

History of Manipur

(Political and Social Aspects)



Historic Loktak

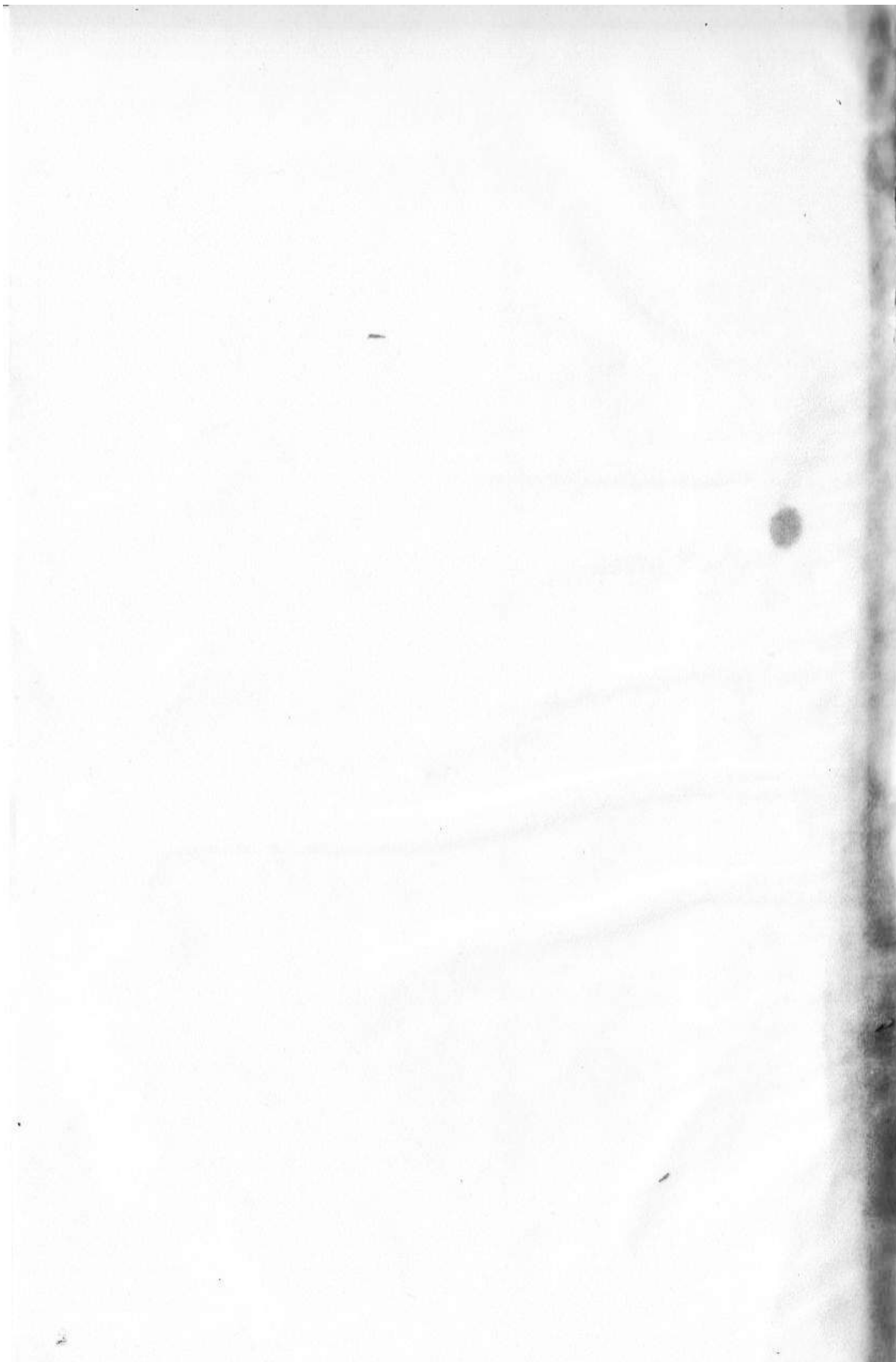
SHRI N. SINHA

About the book :

Manipur, now a tiny Indian state on its easternmost frontier, was an ancient kingdom with a rich cultural heritage. Just as ancient Greece was the land of the historic 'City States', so also it was the land of small 'Independant Principalities' established by distinct ethnic clans in the valley region since the ancient days. Prominent among those were that of the Angoms, Moirangs, Luwangs, Chengleis, Khamuls and the Meiteis. The Chiefs of those clans, as usual in polities, entered into rivalries off and on for dominance over the entire land. This dominance was exercised sometimes by the Khamuls, then by the Moirangs and so on, and ultimately by the Meiteis.

But the history books so far written and published, both by native and foreign scholars, have not been either very authentic or comprehensive. The respective contributions of all the clans in her history have not been taken into account to the extent they deserve.

In the present book the author has made a sincere endeavour to bring to light the respective roles of all the clans, as per the informations provided by all the available sources, in the evolution of the political history and the cosmopolitan society of the land. The specialities of the book are - the narration of her history in it is continous and comprehensive, and the inferences made therein are based on scientific analysis. It is expected that this book will be of great help to the students and research scholars alike.



HISTORY OF MANIPUR

(Political and social aspects)

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FOREWORD

I have a great pleasure in writing this foreword to the book entitled 'History of Manipur (Political and Social Aspects)' by Shri Namadeb Sinha, a repertory of knowledge and experience in 'History' which he gathered, apart from extensive study and research, from his long association with its teaching in both Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate levels. The book portrays a completely new perspective which gives an opportunity to have a glimpse of Gerini's 'Ancient Kingdom of almost forgotten Kings'.

It is quite a formidable task to write a comprehensive history of Manipur with reference to all clans who composed this historic Manipuri community because of the fact that almost all its records and books were believed to have been burnt during the reign of Pamheiba (1714 A.D.- 1754 A.D.) due to the strong under-current of 'Meiteiaisation' process which is prevalent even to these days as is manifest in the recent bonfire of books written in Bengali script. However, credit goes to Sri Sinha for his attempt in the book to bring to light certain significant historical facts--- such as, the early colonisation in Manipur by the scions of the Indo-Aryans, the role of the Bishnupriyas in the history of the land, etc. which have so far remained almost unknown or left ignored by scholars.

Sri Sinha's book is interpretative as well as factual. It is a well-documented one which no scholar, even no ethno-historian, can afford to ignore. I am sure, this book will be of great value to research scholars, students and general public alike.

Dt. 15-04-2005.

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PREFACE

History of Manipur is the history of a small kingdom but of a great cosmopolitan people. Its history of the modern period i.e., the post-Pamheiba period (from 1709 A.D. onwards) is almost well-established, but trouble lies with the ancient period. No written history, inscriptions, coins, monuments, etc. worthy for consideration for the purpose are available. As a result, uptilnow it has remained obscure.

The practice of writing history in Manipur, nay, practically in the whole North-eastern region is of late origin; virtually any work worth mentioning started coming in after the Treaty of Yandabo, 1826 A.D. The British officers posted in the region were the pioneers in the field of historical research, and published a number of books which, though many of the observations they made therein were based on wrong and concocted informations, provide us at least a glimpse of our political and cultural heritage. Soon afterwards, many indigeneous scholars most of whom were Meiteis, undertook researches and published a number of books. Almost all of those books were written as usual, from the stand-point of the Meiteis. Texts, published and unpublished, of the other clans and tribes, who were also the inhabitants of the same land, have not been consulted. Certain important facts and historic events have not received the attention to the extent they deserve. For example, the migration of the Indo-Aryans, the establishment of their principality in the valley region and their subsequent role in the history of this land in the hoary past have not been properly taken into accounts. Whether out of ignorance or ideological prejudice or otherwise, simply allowed those facts to bypass their notice in their writings. The necessity of giving attention to the same fact has also been felt by the noted scholar Dr. Chongtham Budhi. He says, "It may be admitted that the study of the ancient history of peopling of the region, more or less corresponding to present Manipur, cannot be claimed to be comprehensive without considering the picture of the people having some degree of Hindu affiliation, whose settlement here in the hoary past has often been asserted by many scholars. There is some reasonable evidences to substantiate

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their existence at that time, no doubt; only concrete archaeological proof is necessary." Therefore, almost all the books produced so far have not become either very authentic or comprehensive.

In this book I have made a humble attempt to provide a short but comprehensive account of the land taking into consideration the political and social aspects of all the clans and tribes. From the study of all the available sources of information, it is evident that this land since the ancient times was inhabited by different ethnic clans and tribes belonging to the great human races ---the Austroloids, Dravidians, Indo-Aryans, Mongoloids, etc. Prominent among them were the Khabas, Angoms, Moirangs, Chengleis, Luwangs, Khamuls and the Meiteis. This land was dominated sometimes by the Khamuls, then by the Angoms and the Moirangs, then again by the Khamuls, and lastly by the Meiteis. It was the Meitei 'Ningthous' (Kings) who during the later years brought the other clans one after another under their control and amalgamated them into a composite people known as the Manipuri community. Thus, the ancient history of Manipur is not the history of a clan, but of all clans taken together.

I express my deep regard for Sj. Sushil Kumar Sinha, Retd. Director of School Edn., Nagaland, for the kind provision of his 'foreword' to this book. Sj. Sinha is a man of manifold qualities- a renown academician, a seasoned administrator and a devoted social worker. I have also to mention that I owe to my wife, Mrs.Arati Sinha and daughter, Smti.Anamika Sinha, M.A.(Hist.) for their unending support and co-operation throughout the preparation of this book.

This is the age of consumer research. I have consumed a lot of what the scholars have said and written. I must confess my debt to those scholars whose opinions and observations I have quoted in my book. I will always value reasoned criticisms and valuable suggestions. In the end, I fervently hope, this book will increase the enlightenment of the scholars and fulfil the requirements of the students concerned.

Namadeb Sinha

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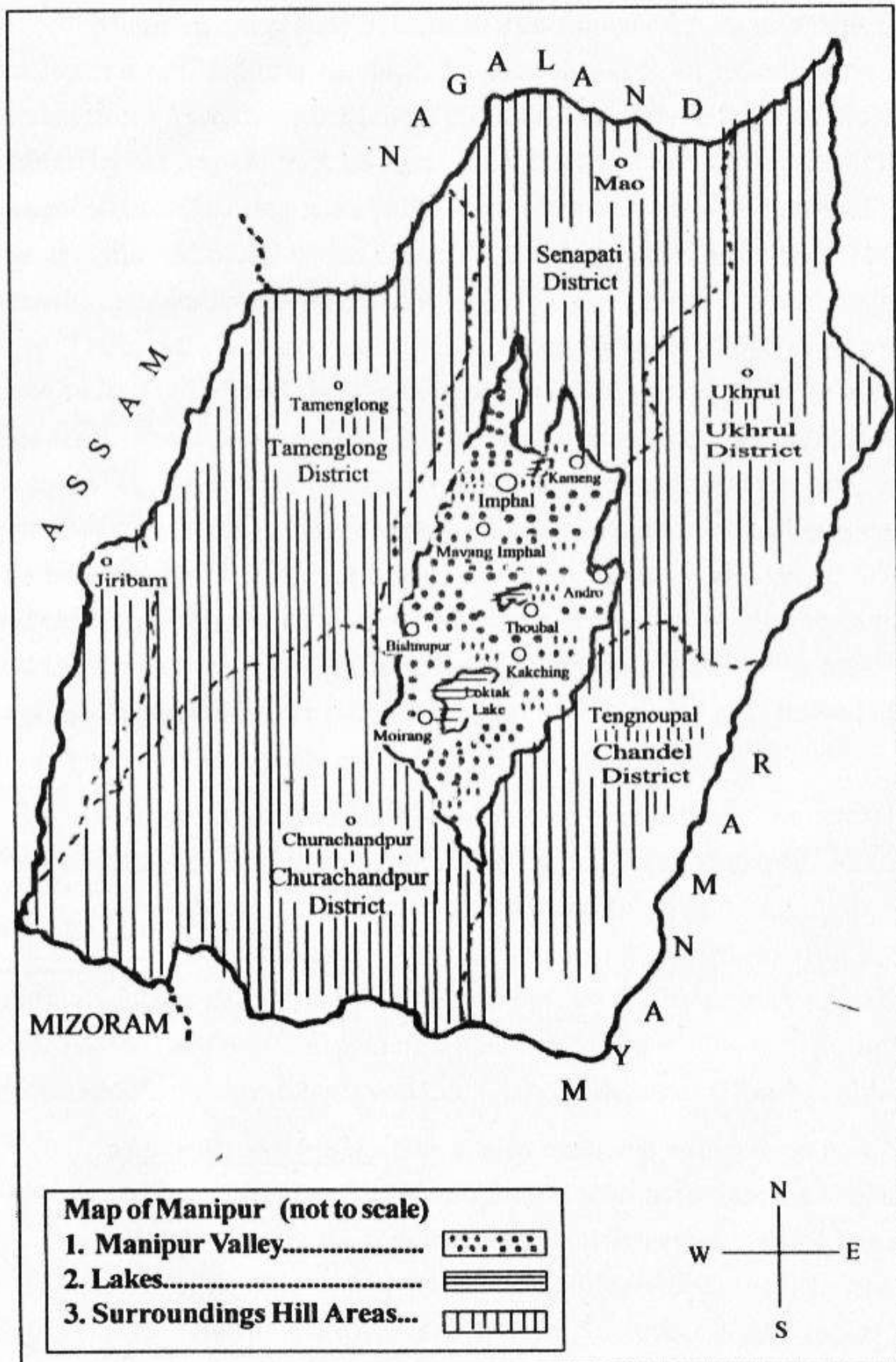
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CHAPTER I

Land and its geographghy

Manipur, a tiny state of India in its north-eastern-most corner, is a land with a rich cultural heritage. Its size varied from time to time. In ancient times it was confined, in all probabilities, only to the small valley drained by the Imphal river comprising about one-tenth of the size of the present state. Like many river valley civilisations of the world, this valley was also the seat of a rich and colourful civilisation. Its present hill areas were the later additions— added to it by its powerful rulers during their hey days. Their state lies between Latitudes 23.50° and 25.30° north and Longitudes 93.10° and 94.30° east, and has an area of 8628 sq.miles, nine-tenth of which consists of hills and mountains. She is bounded in the north by Nagaland, in the east and south by Myanmar and Mizoram, and in the west by Assam. This historic land is showered with all grandeur and beauties by Nature. Her beautiful natural scenery, enchanted lakes and enjoyable climate led vistors to describe her in various glorious terms and comparisons—such as, 'A little Paradise on earth', 'A Flower on lofty heights', 'Kashmir of the East' and so on and so forth. It is, indeed, the most beautiful show-place of the world.

Manipur is a country of blue hills and green valleys. The centrally situated valley is a craddle of human civilisation. It is oval-shaped, 2600 ft.

Geography
of the land.

above sea-level and surrounded by hills on all sides. Its highly fertile land, congenial topography for easy communication and its favourable climate led to the growth of social organisations and political principalities, while in the hills, such political systems could not develop beyond the village societies or village republics.

(a) Rivers and lakes : She is also endowed with a large number of rivers and lakes. Among the rivers special mention may be made of the tw. The first is the Barak, the longest and the largest river, starting from a point of north hills, flows into western and southern hills, and then last to Cachar and the Surma valley of Bangladesh. The other is the Imphal or

Manipur river. It traverses the valley of Manipur, starting from the hills on the north of the valley, flows into the Chin hills and to the river Chindwin in Burma. The rivers-Barak, Jiri and Imphal are navigable for a pretty long course. Loktak is the famous of all the lakes of Manipur. It is the biggest fresh water lake on whose banks grew up the historic principalities of the Kshamuls and the Moirangs. These rivers, lakes and the mountain peaks are interwoven in the life, culture and traditions of the people.

(b) **Flora and Fauna** : The hills of Manipur are covered with rich forests of evergreen varieties. These forests are also the store-houses of precious flora and fauna. The valuable trees and plants like Teak, Pine, Agar and different varieties of bamboo,—the important commodities of international trade,—are available in plenty. Over and above different varieties of orchids, the unique ‘Shiroy Lilly’ (*Lilium Macklenltia*) which grows nowhere in the world, is found in abundance on the Shiroy Kashong hills of Manipur. Of the Fauna, the Indian hornbill, and the rarest of them all, the brown antlered deer, the ‘Sangai’ are worth mentioning.

Land formation of Manipur :

According to the geologists, Manipur together with the whole area of North-east were under water earlier. Later on, owing to some cataclysmic change on the surface of the earth, a great continent which existed in the present Pacific Ocean, went down the water. This caused the water, which kept submerged the whole North-eastern region of India, to move towards the depression. In the process the submerged lands of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Garo Hills and Bengal came above the sea level. As per the geological calculation this happened long before 100 million years. The discovery of fossils of marine fishes and other animals in those places have amply proved the truth of this theory. Though the sea receded from that area, the valley portion of Manipur remained still under water for a long time. However, as a result of natural process of soil-erosion from the surrounding hills and its deposit on the valley, land was gradually formed in the major part of the valley. In course of time it became fit for habitation.

The traditions of Manipur, both oral and written, refer to this land-formation. According to one tradition goddess Durga one day told her husband, Siva, "Darling, while remaining busy in your work of preservation of the Universe, you might have forgotten that you are also the 'Nataraja', the lord of dances". Lord Siva could realise the intention of his dear consort, and accordingly went out in search of a suitable place for the performance which she earnestly desired. At last he came to the place surrounded by the hills of exceptional beauty and covered by a valley full of fragrant flowers of various attractive colours. Lord Siva considered the place ideal for the divine performance.

"Aranya shuvanang drista
bibidha kusuma juktang .
Sankarena niruktyantad
aranya nagarang nripa" .

– *Dharani Samhita.*

The valley was still under water. It was present Manipur and its Logtak valley. Lord Siva with his 'trident' made a hole through the hills which formed an outlet for the excess water. The water passed out through it, and the beautiful valley of Manipur came out. It was here that Siva-Durga went on performing their divine dance. Being very much enlightened at the sight of this, Ananta, the Lord of Serpents, sprinkled hundreds and thousands of 'Manis' (Jewels) over the whole valley. The entire valley became over flooded by the light of these bright 'Manis'. Thenceforward, the land came to be known as Manipur (Mani=Jewel, Pur=City or land) i.e., the land of Jewels.

"The same information of the land is there in the Meitei Manipuri tradition found in the Puraṇ, 'Leithak Leikharol', it was written that "One day Mahadeb narrated Ganesh the story of the creation of Manipur. In the beginning Manipur was under water. Nine 'Laipumningthous' (Gods) and seven Lainuras (Goddesses) created the land of Manipur by throwing earth into water. After the formation of the land, 'Atia Guru Shidaba', the

Lord of the Universe entrusted god Kodin with the task of making mortal beings. Accordingly Kodin placed before the Guru seven monkeys and seven frogs. But the Guru did not approve of them because they had no intelligence. Kodin then produced an image of man. The Guru then bestowed life in it. Thus the first man was brought on this earth. Afterwards the frogs were placed in water, the monkeys were placed on the hills, and the man was placed in the valley."

Descriptions given in the traditions are undoubtedly over-narrated with religious beliefs; but they do contain substance of history. Events per chance, by being passed from one mouth to other for centuries, might have become exaggerated. Yet the essence of tradition is always true. The essence in both the traditions is that Manipur along with other parts of the region were under water in the distant past. Later on, water receded on account of the reason put forward by the geologists, and present Manipur with its beautiful hills and Valley came into existence.

In early times, Manipur was known by different nomenclatures as forming part of the Aryavarta. Basing on the epic and the puranic evidences, 'Vijoy Panchali', a nineteenth century history says that the land was called Aranya-Nagar, Mohendranagar, then Mekhala and finally

Different names of the land

Manipur. The name 'Manipur' is a sanskritic one. Literally it means the city or land of Manis i.e., jewels (mani = Jewel, pur = city or land). However, this land and her people were known by different names to her neighbours. It was called 'Kathe' by the Burmese, 'Monglie' by the Cacharis, 'Mekhlee' by the Assamese, 'Cassey' by the Shans and 'Monglai' by the Bengalees. In the first recorded treaty between the East India Company and Joi Singh in 1762, this kingdom was recorded as 'Meckley'.

CHAPTER II

(Sources of information)

The ancient history of Manipur is lost in obscurity on account of the absence of written history. This, however, does not mean that the land has only a mute past. Different sources of informations are there to give witness to it, but they have not been properly accounted for. It is an encouraging fact that the interest of the scholars to write its history collecting information from the available sources is in the increase recently. The practice of writing history in North-east India is of late origin, and virtually any work worth mentioning started coming in after the advent of the British in this area after the Treaty of Yandabo with the Burmese in 1826 A.D. The British officers posted there were the pioneers in the field of historical researches, and by doing so, they have provided us the first opportunity to have a glimpse of our political and cultural heritage through their eyes. They began to gather available sources of information and highlight them in their writings. These writings contain at certain points inappropriate explanations, no doubt, but there is no denying the fact that their writings also serve as valuable materials for the reconstruction of the history of Manipur. Among the writings of the British officials, the following are the most worthy for mention:

1. Report on the Eastern Frontier of India, published in 1835 A.D. by Capt. Pamberton.
2. An Account of the Valley of Manipur by McCulloch.
3. Statistical Account of Manipur, by Dr. R. Brown.
4. My experience in Manipur and the Naga hills, by Johnstone.
5. My three years in Manipur, by Ethel St. Clair Grimwood.

6. The Metheis,
by T.C. Hodson.
7. Administrative report, 1933-34,
by G.P. Stewart, I.C.S.

The writings of British scholars are also no less important. Among those, special mention may be made of "The Linguistic Survey of India", Vol.I by Grierson, "A Glimpse of the History of Assam" by E.Gaits, etc. Towards the close of the nineteenth century Bengali scholars- Nihar Nath Bannerjee and Umesh Ch. Ghose took interest and translated in English some of the Royal chronicles of Manipur. W. Yamjao Singh, the noted archaeologist and scholar, conducted excavations privately and brought to light many important relics relating to the past history of Manipur. He also collected a number of manuscripts consisting of literary, historical, astronomical and miscellaneous other aspects of the land of which special mention may be made of the Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Ningthourol Singkak, the Poireiton Khuntokpa, Dharani Samhita and Srimat Bhagabat. They are the important primary sources of information for the construction of the early and medieval history of Manipur.

From the middle of the twentieth century investigations were made in different branches of the history of Manipur by a number of native scholars and published them. Their works throw a flood of light on the heritage of the land. Among those publications special mention may be made of the following :

1. Manipur Sanatan Dharma,
by Panditraj Atambapu Sarma.
2. Bijoy Panchali,
by Mutum Jhulan Singh.
3. A Short History of Manipur,
by Jhaljit Singh.

4. Glimpses of Manipur,
by R.K. Snahal Singh.
5. The Study of the Cultures of the Various Tribes
living in the Hills of Manipur,
by Prof. G. Kabui.
6. Manipurer Prachinadhunik Itihas,
by Sena Singha.
7. A History of Manipuri Literature,
by Ch. Manihar Singh.

Thus, the glory and greatness of Manipur have been gradually coming out from darkness to light. The investigations and observations of scholars, - the English and native, have provided the skeleton of the history of the land to which the following sources of informations added flesh.

Archaeological Findings:

The archaeological research in Manipur is started by W. Yumjao Singh, the noted scholar and archaeologist, as early as 1935. His "Report² on the Archaeological Studies in Manipur" was based on an excavation conducted by him on an ancient historical site near Imphal. "In¹ addition to other finds, namely, pottery, rectangular bronze coins bearing inscription in Sanskrit and Devnagari script (dated to 107 A.D.) are very significant." It clearly suggests the penetration of the Indo-Aryans into the land and its Aryanisation since the ancient times. The next archaeologist after W. Yumjao Singh was Shri O. Kumar Singh. He carried on excavations at Khangkhui in Manipur East District, on a hill top in Tengnoupal, and at Theron in Tamenglong and discovered a number of cultural materials consisting of stone and bone tools, pebbles, chopper, etc. which confirm that Manipur was inhabited by Stone Age ancestors. He published his first report on the archaeological finds of Manipur in the "Journal² of Assam Science Society, Vol. XII" in 1969. Other

important finds by Sri Singh include bronze vessels, coins, beads and potsherds from Sekta mound, Irengbam, Mairemba and Phunam,—all from the Manipur Valley. They are the materials of the early Metal Age. These archaeological discoveries, though not adequate, suggest that this tiny borderland state in the north-easternmost corner of our country abounds in source materials of pre-historic period.

Another source of informations is the inscriptions. Study of inscription is called epigraphy, and the information it provides is called epigraphic evidence. Inscriptions are mostly engraved on stones, copper plates and iron plates. The inscriptions so far discovered in Manipur

Epigraphic evidences

 give informations of mainly historical events and wars. They also confirm the information given by other sources. The Phayeng Copper Plate, discovered by W. Yamjao Singh and stated to belong to the period of king Khongtekcha of the eighth century A.D., is considered as the oldest inscription of Manipur. It was written in archaic Meitei script, includes the word 'Sri' and mentions the names of many popular gods and goddesses like Siva³, Durga, Ganesh and Visvakarma. "There⁴ are three other stone inscriptions at Khoibu; in two of them the name of king Keyamba (1467 A.D.- 1508 A.D.) and the words 'Sri' and 'Srijut' are inscribed; and the third one is on the prohibition of the preparation of 'Hamei', a fermenting agent of rice beer." The stone inscription at Leisangkhong is a record of the inauguration of a market in 1819 A.D. to commemorate the victory of Marjit Singh over the Hedambo King of Cachar, Bengali and archaic Meitei scripts are used in writing and includes the word 'Sri Panchayukta'. "Copper plates issued by the kings to the Andro Loi village, Kharam Naga village, to one gentleman at Sagalmang village in appreciation of their services are fortunately still with the villagers. Another copper plate charter dated 1772 Saka/1850 A.D. issued by Maharaja Chandrakirti unearthed at Vishnupur village records the elevation of his two favourite servants to higher posts."

Informations gathered from the coins or the numismatic evidences help us in the fixation of dates of kings, their religious beliefs, personal tastes and the extension of territories of the Kings. The coins

Numismatic
evidences

current in the country were of three types- bell-metal, silver and gold. Archaeologist W. Yamjao Singh discovered some rectangular bronze coins of the beginning of the Christian era in Devanagari script in one site of his excavations in the Manipur Valley. Majority of the coins current in the kingdom before Maharaj Garib Niwaz were only in archaic Meitei script. But from the time of Garib Niwaz (1709 A.D.- 1748 A.D.) Devanagari script were again found used on the coins, and from the time of Labanya Chandra (1798 A.D.- 1801 A.D.) we find coins struck in Assamese- Bengali scripts. The use of Devanagari script in the ancient time indicates the penetration of Hinduism in Manipur in the ancient age. That Hinduism was overshadowed temporarily during early medieval period of Manipur is indicated by the use of Meitei script. Influence of Vaishnavism from the 18th century is indicated by the revival of Devanagari script and the use of Bengali script on the coins. While the growing prosperity of the land during the later years was established by the issue of silver and gold coins by Maharaja- Chourajit Singh. Manipur has been styled as a kingdom without much of the remnants of palaces, rich monuments and temples. Historical temples and monuments are very few. The earliest temple which is believed to be of the 15th/16th century A.D. is the Vishnu Temple at Bishnupur now called as Bishenpur. Non-availability of monuments prior to it is perhaps due to the frequent devastating invasions of the Burmese

Temples and
monuments

or due to the fact that as the art of making bricks was unknown in Manipur at that time, constructions were made of wood and other perishable materials which are easily weathered when exposed to tropical and sub-tropical climate. Anyway, "the Stupa⁵ type of roof of the Vishnu Temple, the hut-type temple of Krishna and other monuments at Imphal indicate the influence of both Buddhist and

Vaishnavite Hindu architecture. If the Vishnu Temple is dated to the 15th/16th century A.D., the Buddhist influence is earlier than the Hindu.”

Literary Sources:

The epics, Puranas, Meitei Puranas (the Puyas) contain traditions; and these traditional stories are the important sources of informations of the early history of Manipur. According to the legend contained in the Adi and Asvamedha parvas of the Mahabharata, the Manipuris claim

(a) Epics and Puranas

descent from Prince Vabruvahana, son of Arjuna, the third Pandava hero. It is believed that the Mahabharata of the Kurukshetra war took place about 600/500 years before Christ. Therefore, Manipur was an ancient land known to the rest of the country since that time. Again, “the⁶ Sankhyayana Griha-Sangraha describes Manipur as a sacred land. It is also known as the Land of sun-rise (Chap.II, 38, Banares Sanskrit Series) which has been confirmed both by the Markendeya Puran (58,109) and the Brihat Sanghita of Varahamihir on the basis of Parasara⁷ Tantra of the beginning of the Christian era.

The Puyas (the Meitei Puranas) written in archaic Meitei script found in the custody of the Pibas (the eldest male line of a clan) or of the Pandits contain informations about the dynasties which reigned in Manipur

(b) Puyas or Meitei puranas

in different ages at various places. Some of the Puyas worth-mentioning are Leithak Leikharol, Phundin, Chekhong Nongkhrang, Sangai Phamang and Khagemba Yumlep. The ‘Kshamul Puran’ written by Pandit Navakhendra Singha provides the geneology of the Kshamul Kings, and the subsequent merger of their territory to the Meitei Kingdom during the 14th century A.D. The book is now not available; however the translated text of the book in English and Bengali are with historians- Nabadwip Singha of Tripura and Sena Singha of Bekirpar, Cachar respectively.

Manipur Valley has been the home of different clans since the ancient times. The compilation of the history of the land, therefore, is required to be based on the chronological records of those clans. The

(c) Historical
writings

best known writings of such sorts are--the Cheitharol Kumbaba and the Ningthourol Lambuba,--record of the geneology of the Meitei Kings and the narrative of their activities; the Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba,--the chronology of the Moirang Kings; the Chengleirol,--history of the Kings of the Chenglei dynasty; the Chakparol--the history of the Chakpas; and the Khuman Kangleirol--the account of the Khamul rulers who maintained an independant principality in the southern part of Manipur. This history shows how the dominion of the Khamul clan was merged with the Meitei kingdom during the reign of Kongyamba (1324 A.D.- 1335 A.D.).

Since the ancient times people migrated from all corners to this land and settled here permanently. The migration and settlement of these

immigration
books

people are narrated in the immigration books. Immigration to this land is known of the Brahmins from the book, 'Bamon Khunthokpa', of the Kshatriyas from 'Kshetrilon', of Poireiton from 'Poireiton Khuntokpa', of the Scribes from 'Leirik Yengbum', of the people from the west from 'Nongchup Haram', and those from the east from 'Nongpok Haram'.

Contents of the books mentioned above are in most cases, legendary stories of literary merit, and records of clumsy information of events which took place in ancient times in the land. Most of the literary works bear neither the dates of their composition nor the names of their authors. The 'Puyas' written in archaic Meitei script are claimed to be the most ancient literary composition of the land; but a very controversial question to be determined is -- from which period this indigeneous script been practised in Manipur? Opinions differ on the subject. Some say that they were practised in Manipur not later than the reigning period of King Wura Konthouba (568 A.D.- 658 A.D.). Hodson and Damant

give their respective accounts of datings not earlier than 1540 A.D. and 1700 A.D. respectively. Moreover, certain facts are there in other ancient literary works which leave some room of doubt regarding the authenticity of the informations they furnished. Let⁸ us take the case of "Cheitharol Kumbaba", the royal chronicle of Manipur professing to record all the important transactions and occurrences of the state since the 1st century A.D. It is found in the "Report of the Archaeological Studies in Manipur"- by W. Yumjao Singh- "By the orders of Jai Singh this book was re-written as the former copy was no more available there". Exactly since when the book became unavailable is not known. The gap of time must have been very wide when the decision was made for its re-writing. In this task the writer had mostly to depend upon his memory which is susceptible to come under the adverse affect of time. In view of this who will agree to certify that re-written work as the true copy of the original one. Further, the reigning periods of many of the kings of its genealogical list ranges from 90 to 120 years which is simply unreasonable. Therefore, in most cases, the informations provided by the ancient literary sources is vague and confused. History based on such sources is bound to be limited in scope, but considering the dearth of reliable materials such a limitation cannot be avoided.

Foreign Sources :

As regards the foreign sources of informations, the most relevant to our purpose are the accounts of the classical Greek merchants and geographers, the Chinese, Burmese and the Shan chronicles, and the Ahom Buranjis. The accounts of the classical Greek writers mentioned the location and importance of Manipur and the adjoining regions from the 5th century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. The anonymous Greek author of the 'Periplus of the Erythrean Sea', while referring to the trade activities of Manipur mentioned an annual mart in the confines of 'Thina' (identified as Chin Hills on the south-eastern border of Manipur) where the 'Se-sa-te' assembled. This 'se-sa-te' are in all probabilities, the 'kha-la-

chais' (children of the wide lake) who belong to the race of people who lived in the plain portion of the Manipur Valley. Klandios Ptolemy, the famous Greek geographer, wrote a geographical account of India in the 2nd century A.D. in which the land of Manipur and the adjoining regions are mentioned. The land 'Mareura' which he mentioned in his account is identified by modern scholars as Manipur. The⁹ Chinese records of the 2nd century A.D.,--as stated by Pelliot,- mention the existence of Brahminical religion in Manipur.

"The Burmese royal chronicle¹⁰, 'Maharajvamsa' refers to Dhajaraja of the Sakya race who settled at Manipur in about 550 B.C. and conquered upper Pagan (Burma). It mentioned in the Shan chronicles that in 777 A.D. the Pong King Sookampha despatched his brother Samlongpha with a strong force to conquer the countries of north-east India. He conquered the principalities of Bhamo, Cachar and Tripura. From Tripura he marched across the hills, and descended into the Manipur Valley near Moirang, on the western bank of the Loktak Lake. According to Ney Elias these events took place in the early part of the 13th century A.D."

The Buranjis of Assam also refer to the land of Manipur, and some events of historical significance. The Buranjis relevant to the history of Manipur are---the Ahom Buranji-- translated by Rai Sahib Golap °Ch. Borua, Ahomar Adi Buranji--by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, and Kamarupar Buranji edited by S.K. Bhuyan. The ¹¹Kamarupar Buranji describes Manipur under Babruvahan and gives a genealogy of subsequent rulers of Manipur along with their administrative activities.

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CHAPTER III

(Early man and genesis of independent clans.)

The existence of early man in Manipur has been unknown so long. But the recent¹ archaeological discoveries made by the noted archaeologists, W.Yumjao Singh and Sri O.Kumar Singh, (though the cultural materials discovered are insufficient), reveal that Manipur was inhabited by early man since the Stone Age period. Sri O.Kumar Singh² conducted excavations at different places in Manipur, particularly in the valley. The excavations he conducted at Khangkhui in Ukhrul district, at Machi in Chandel district, at Nongpok Keithelmanbi in Senapati district and at many other sites yield Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) remains of stone and bone tools, such as, pebbles, choppers, axes, digging tools,

Paleolithic man

 circular hurling stones, etc. These discoveries establish the existence of Paleolithic men in Manipur in the pre-historic times. They were nomads moving from place to place in search of their livelihood. From the crude workmanship of the materials discovered and from the discovery of several caves it is presumed that the Paleolithic men were a savage people who sought shelter under trees and natural caverns. They lived on roots, fruits, nuts and the raw flesh of wild animals.

The next stage in the progress of men in Manipur, as elsewhere, was reached when the use of the rough and crude stone implement was not completely discarded, but most of them were carefully dressed and

Neolithic man

 polished. The Neolithic remains are found in the hills and valley of Manipur. So far only³ three stratified neolith sites--one at Phunan in the Imphal district, the second at Napachik in Bishnupur district, and the third at Nongpok Keithelmanbi in Senapati district are discovered. But most of the neolith stone tools are stray finds collected from either jhum-fields or accidental diggings. In addition to the rough paleolithic remains, neolithic polished tools and implements like chisels, hammers, beads, buttons, tripod wares, cord-marked pottery, decorated

pottery, etc. have been discovered from the sites. 'According to some scholars, the people of the age understood the use of fire, made pottery, cultivated grains and domesticated animals. But as these theories are based on surface finds alone, no definite conclusions are possible. Neolithic man selected mostly the open-air sites for their settlement. As is evident from the sites of discovery of their remains, the⁴ Neolithic men reached the valley proper at least not later than 2000 B.C.; and from the distribution of the find-spots, it also appears that the southern part of the Valley was occupied earlier and later on the northern one.

The Neolithic Age was followed by the Age of Metals—a cultural phase of great significance in human history. The transition was slow and gradual. 'The Metal Age in Manipur appears to be very late, and so far no separate copper-bronze and iron relics have been found. At present the Metal Age remains have been found only at four sites--Mongjam,

Metal Age

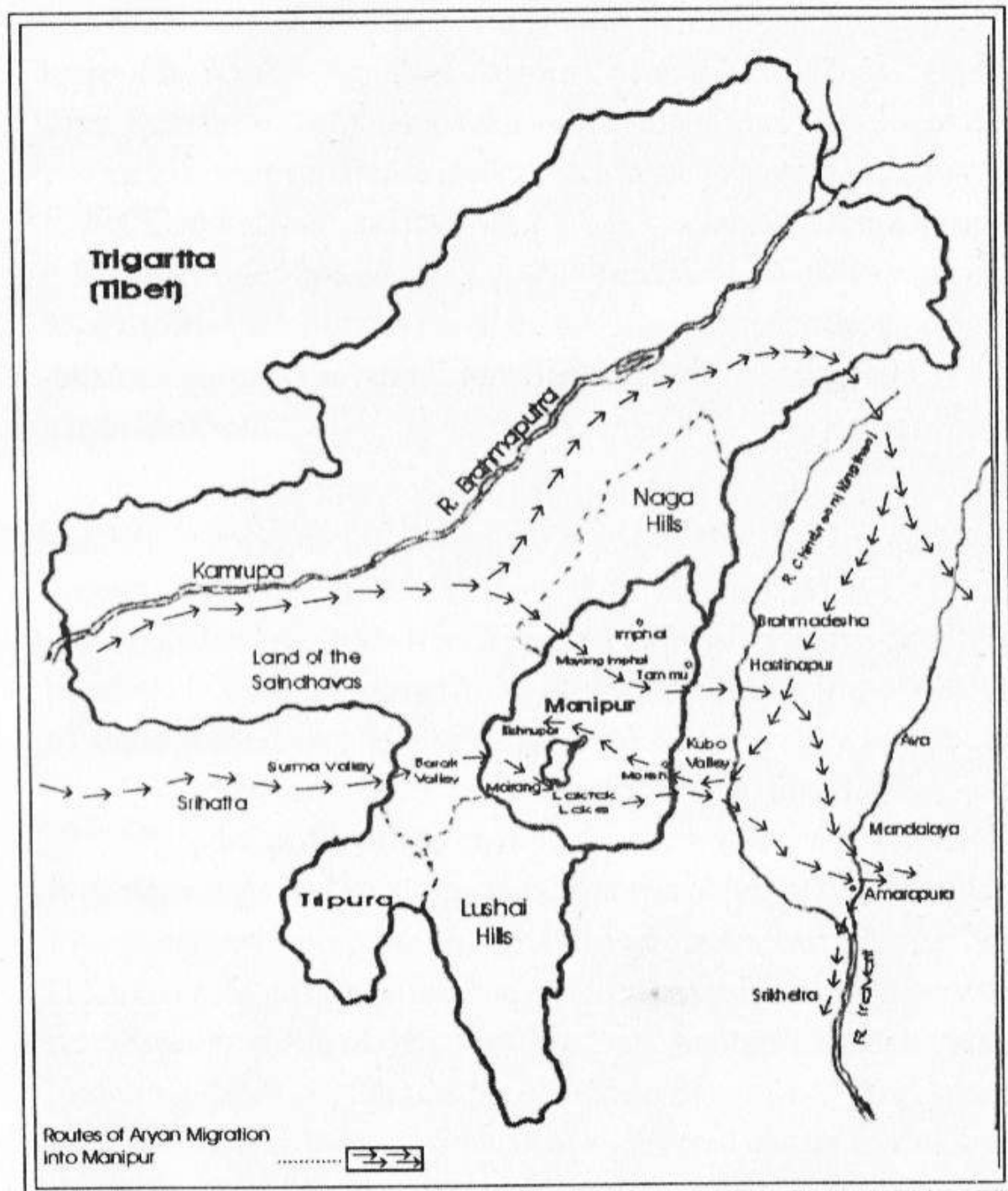
 Imphal district; Nongpok Keithelmanbi, Senapati district; Panjaopallumching, Thoubal district; and Moirang, Bishnupur district'. It is difficult to say about its antiquity. However, ⁵Shri O.K. Singh has given a tentative estimation of the Age in Manipur. This cultural phase, according to his estimate, belonged to a period between few centuries before and after Christ.

Genesis of Ethnic Clans :

As regards the genesis of the ethnic clans in Manipur, the process began when the early men of the Neolithic Age discovered agriculture and became food producers. They were no longer needed to move from place to place in search of food. They then began to settle in social groups near the fields they cultivated in huts made of mud, wood, straws and leaves. This paved the way for the development of the stable and

Autochthonous Clans

 organised life. Various social groups lived independent lives of their own in respective villages. In course of time villages got crystallised into distinct clans and tribes on the basis of



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their common culture and language. Though the pre-history of Manipur is still under investigation, all evidences point to the fact that the earliest clans who established their strongholds in different parts of the land were--⁶the Khaba- Nganbas, Angoms, Moirangs, and the Chengleis. They were the autochthonous clans of Manipur, and it is perhaps these people who were referred to in the epic, Mahabharata and in the Puranas as the 'Gandharvas' and the 'Kiratas'. Each clan had its independant principality ruled by its own King. The exact period of their origin is yet to be ascertained. But this is certain that they existed in the land before the Christian era. They might have been Austric or Mongoloid, or even a hybrid of both.

The ethnic composition of Manipur was further increased by another historic factor. This land acted as the gateway of human migrations. ⁷Scholars are of the view that Manipur had been in the past one of the land routes between the east and the west, and naturally a meeting place of immigrants from the east as well as from the west. One of them passed through Kamrup through the valley of the river

Routes of migrations

 Brahmaputra. From the foot of the Naga Hills, it again became divided into branch routes,-- one branch went upto Sadiya from where it passed into the upper Chindwin Valley of Burma (modern Myanmar); and the other one passed through the narrow valleys of Naga Hills, entered into north Manipur, and then passed into the Kubo Valley on the western bank of the river Chindwin. Another route fell through the Surma Valley in Sylhet district of modern Bangladesh. Then it passed through the Barak Valley in South Assam, entered into the Loktak valley of Manipur, and finally passed into Burma.

Since the remote past, migration of the great human races took place in waves through these land routes both from the West and the

Settlement of new clans

 East. In course of these migrations, each race in each wave used to leave a remnant of its people on this land. From the

West migrated the Indo-Aryans, and from the East, the Tibeto-Burmans, Chin-Kukis and other Mongolian people, leaving their remnants which made the land at the dawn of history, nay, before its dawning, the homeland of several other new clans. Among them the remnants of the Indo-Aryans, as usual, prefer the plain lands of the Loktak Valley and settled there. They were the descendants of the Vedic Kshatriyas. They carried along with them their traditional culture, language and religion. They were the sincere followers of Lord Vishnu. They installed the idol of Lord Vishnu at a place, and settled permanently in and around it and named it Bishnupur (This place's name still exists in Manipur). This Indo-Aryan clan in course of time came to be known as 'Khamuls' (i.e., Kha = Kshatriya + mul = root, original) and also as the 'Bishnupriyas' (darlings of Vishnu) or the 'Bishnupuriyas' (the people of Bishnupur). That the people of the Khamul clan were also known as Bishnupriyas is endorsed by historian Sena Singha. He says, "In his opinion the Khamuls were the earliest ruling race of Manipur. In course of time these people were called as Bishnupriyas".⁸ Dr. K.P. Sinha also gives hints of these namings of the clan in his booklet 'The Bishnupriya Manipuris'. The remnants of the later migrants who migrated from the east, on the other hand, settled on the surrounding hilly areas of the valley, and they were in all probabilities, the Meiteis, the Mangangs, Khendes, etc. It is, therefore, proved that from the very early times there had been migrations and settlements of the people of various racial origin, resulting in the increase of population of the valley and changing of its demography in gradual process.

According to traditions and popular beliefs, the Bishnupriya Manipuris claim that they were the 'Khamuls' (original Kshatriyas) being the descendants of Babruvahana, son of the third Pandava of the Mahabharata. The story of Arjuna's visit to Manipur and his marriage with Chitrangada, the daughter of the Gandharva king of Manipur is

almost well-known to require repetition. But the historicity of this story of the Mahabharata, and the identification of that Manipur with the present Manipur are questioned from many quarters. Although the common Meiteis believe everything of it, and also claim their descent from the same Babruvahana, many writers of this ethnic group opine that the story of the Mahabharata is unhistorical, and the present Manipur is not that Manipur mentioned in the Epic. Some say that it was in Kalinga, while some others locate it in the Ganjam district of Orissa. Their authority appears to be one of the 'Slokas' (hymns) of the Adi Parva of the Mahabharata which runs thus:

“*9Mohendra parvatang dristva tapasai-rupa shuvitang.*

Samudra tirena shanoi Manipurang jagamaha”.

The meaning of the 'sloka' is that after seeing the beauties of Mount Mahendra (Arjuna) went to Manipur which was situated on the sea-coast. Following this 'sloka' it is argued that Manipur of the Mahabharata cannot be identified with present Manipur which is far away from the sea-coast. E. Gait, in a foot note in his book “¹⁰A History of Assam”, Ed. 1926 also subscribes to this view. This view, however, seems inappropriate because it is based on an incomplete quotation. Had the writers read this 'sloka' just previous to this one, as historian L. Iboongohal Singh rightly points out, they would not have said that Manipur was in Kalinga. It was clearly written there :

“¹¹*Sa kalingan atikramya desanaya tathani cha .*

Harmani Ramaniyani prekhyomanou yajou Prabhu”.

This establishes that he (Arjuna) already crossed over Kalinga in course of his journey. Again, Manipur cannot be located in Ganjam district in Orissa which is in the south of Kalinga; because in another 'sloka' in the beginning of the same chapter under reference it is written:

“¹²*Praching disam abhipresu jogamaha Bharatavarshava ll”*

'Prachi' in sanskrit means the east, and hence this 'sloka' indicates that Arjuna went to the direction of the east, but not to the south. From the analysis of the 'slokas' given above one may reasonably infer that Manipur of the Mahabharata was neither anywhere in Orissa (Kalinga) nor in the south of it where Ganjam exists. It was in the eastern India; and in all probabilities, it was the present Manipur valley which is on the shores around the Loktak lake. As the Aryans, as the modern researches reveal, were originally the dwellers of land-locked territories, the sea was unknown to them. Their words 'Sindhu' or 'Samudra' were used by them to denote large expanses of water. Hence the mentioning of Manipur on 'Samudra-tirena' i.e., on the sea-shore might be the indication of its location on the shores of the vast Loktak lake. The Mahendra Parvat under reference was not the Mt. Eastern Ghat, as some scholars believe, but an important hill of Manipur nowadays known as the Nongmaiching hill. In this connection it is to be noted that one of the ancient names of the land was 'Mahendranagar'.

Another well-reputed scholar, Padmanath Vidyabinode has thrown the same light on the location of Manipur of the Mahabharata. ¹³He points out that in the 'Asvamedha parva' the sacrificial horse let loose by Yudhisthira, entered the kingdom of Pragjyotishpura, after having passed through 'Trigartta' (identified as Tibbet); and then it immediately went to the country of the 'Saindhavas (probably the country of Syntengs-Khasi and Jayantia Hills), and passing through a good many places reached Manipur. The kingdom of Manipur extended upto the sea (as probably the Lushai Hills, the Chittagong hill tracks and Arakan were included in it then), and the horse reached the sea-coast, then it turned its course towards the direction of Hastinapur and entered the territory of Magadha (Behar). In this way, Shri Vidyabinode tried to locate Manipur of Mahabharata at present Manipur. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee¹⁴ is also in favour of claiming present Manipur as the Manipur

of the Mahabharata. In this regard it should be noted that it has not yet been possible to locate this Manipur with definite proofs elsewhere. Under the circumstances it can be presumed with a reasonable amount of certainty that Manipur of Mahabharata is none other than the present Manipur. The story in question might be an allegory, -the marriage between Arjun and Chitrangada may be interpreted as the hint of fusion between the 'Khamuls' and the indigeneous Gandharvas. Their descendants, who ruled Manipur continuously during the subsequent early ages, were the predecessors of the present Bishnupriya Manipuris. The same observation is also made by a research scholar Shri Bidhan Sinha¹⁵ that this Aryan people are presumed to be the Bishnupriya Manipuris. In any case, if Manipur of the epic be the same as Manipur of to-day, her civilisation must have been existed earlier than the 6th century B.C. when the Epic was written.

This early movement of the Indo-Aryan and their settlement in the Manipur Valley is also proved by the evidences furnished by other traditions, and references found in the chronicle of the neighbouring countries. ¹⁶"According to the Burmese Royal chronicles, 'Maharaja Vamsa', Dhajaraja, a king of Sakya race settled in Manipur in about 550 B.C. who later on conquered old or upper Pagan (Burma)". Another migration took place during the 4th century B.C. Kalingas were inhabiting on both banks of the Ganga in its lower course as is evidenced by Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Mourya. R.K. Kanchan¹⁷ mentioned that "Kalingas of Ganga Valley spread to Surma Valley in Sylhet district and crossed Manipur from where they advanced to the valley lying between the two rivers Kuladana and Chindwin". After the downfall of the Mouryas, according to certain records, another movement of the Aryan people took place. When Pushyamitra murdered the members of the royal family, those who were lucky to escape the sword of the rebel leader, fled to

Burma following the route passing through Manipur and accompanied by a large number of loyal soldiers, officers, priests, administrators teachers and manial staff. They founded their settlement at a place situated in the northern part of the Kubo Valley in the modern district of Chindwin. The place of their settlement was named 'Mourya'. The coming of this Mouryan party by this route is confirmed by a piece of stone inscribed in corrupt Burmese 'Mweyin' found in village Po-U-Duang.

Again, in the Puranas of Manipur there are several stories regarding the coming of 'Gurus' and 'Poireitons'. Shri J.Roy interpretes 'Poireiton' to be the corruption of the sanskrit word 'Purohit', which means Brahmin priests. Therefore, the Gurus and Poireitons referred to in the Meitei traditions were the Indo-Aryan scholars and priests, and so were the missionaries of Aryan culture in Manipur during the early days.

Thus the remnants of the Aryans left by these waves were the Khamuls (Kha-muls) or the Bishnupriyas. They later on became bonafide people of the Valley with their headquarter at Bishnupur, now called Bishenpur. That they were the permanent dwellers is proved by their oral traditions, folk-songs and rain songs. At the sight of any big area of water, any Bishnupriya, wherever he may be, will immediately utter the words "Loktakgo para ochhe he ", which means "Oh! it is like the Loktak". In times of draught, Bishnupriya Manipuri women are even now found singing the traditional rain song-

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*"Khamulor mati hukeilo
Sadalelte rajaro
Baran de dou raja*

*Leipak pungou koilo
Leipak pungou koilo
Baran de dou raja."*

Its meaning in English is - "The land of Khamul is dried up and cracks occurred there. Oh! Sadalel (Lord Indra), the King of Gods, bestow rain". Even in exile in the neighbouring lands, the memory of their

homeland does not disappear from their memory. Hon'ble Mr. Justice S.Haque in his recommendation to the State Government of Assam in Oct., 1995 observed the same thing. He writes about the Bishnupriya Manipuris thus - "...The Bishnupriyas entered Manipur from the west, and their original spoken language was of Indo-Aryan group, slightly akin to Bengali. The Bishnupriya people were purely followers of 'Vishnu-cult' formed from the very ancient times. They installed the image of Lord Vishnu at Bishnupur, they were also called as Bishnupuriyas (inhabitant of Bishnupur), and Bishnupriya was a contracted form of Bishnupuriya".

Indo-Aryans- Khamuls

This new people in the Loktak valley were also called as 'Kha-la-chais'. Probably it was the naming of the people by the Chinese. In Chinese language 'Kha' means closed water/lake, 'la' means wide, and 'chais' means children. Therefore, the 'Kha-la-chais' obviously means the people of the wide lake Loktak i.e., the Khamuls or the Bishnupriyas. Anyway, the Khamuls or the Bishnupriyas or the Khalachais, as Mr. R.M.Nath says¹⁹ "...were the first cultured race in possession of the Manipur Valley, - they were connected more with the neighbouring kingdom of Kamrupa and that is why their language is more akin to Kamrupi". They might have been using 'Devanagari' script. ²⁰A kind of small coin made of bell-metal with word 'Sri' cut on them were perhaps in circulation in those days. A coin of the Devanagari script dated 164 Sambat (2nd century A.D.) has been discovered in the Aheibam village in Imphal. The Khamuls or the Bishnupriyas were extremely religious-minded and built many temples after the names of their popular gods and goddesses. Almost all of them perished because of the forces of nature and lack of proper maintenance. However, one Vishnu temple is still there at Bishnupur. The temple is now no more in use, and lies in a very neglected condition. It is feared, if this condition is allowed to continue, at any time this holy shrine, and also an important historical monument may also disappear.

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CHAPTER IV

(The Pancha-Bishnupriyas—its origin and period of supremacy)

The history of Manipur since the ancient times till 1709 A.D. i.e., the date of accession of Pamheiba alias Garib Niwaz on the throne is not properly accounted for. For the history of this long period we are to depend mainly on oral traditions, legends and accounts. The informations which they provide, in most cases, are vague, confusing and conflicting. They contain lots of chaffs which are to be blown away. The task is, however, very difficult. Moreover, much room is there for putting question on the authenticity of the informations they provide. But considering the dearth of reliable materials such a limitation cannot be avoided.

The Khamuls, some Indo-Aryan people, as was discussed in the previous chapter, came and settled in the territories of the Manipur Valley during the pre-historic times. They carved out a principality of their own and began to live there permanently. This colonisation by the Indo-Aryan cultural group has its reflection in an indigeneous account, 'Poireiton Khuntokpa'. According to it 'Poireitons' came at different times from the west and established their villages in the Manipur Valley where they lit up their sacred fire. 'Poireiton', as mentioned in the previous chapter, seems to be the local modification of the Sanskrit word 'Purohit' - the Aryan clergy who usually accompanied the Aryan colonisers in the East for the performance of their necessary religious rites. This accounts lent support to the fact that these Indo-Aryan villages on the basis of common race, culture and tradition crystallised into a principality under a chief. The Purohitis were there to perform their religious rites. At the present stage of our knowledge, the location of their prinipality was probably to the south-west of present Imphal, and their capital was at Bishnupur, also pronounced as Bishenpur. They were

known variously as Bishnupriyas, Bishnupurias and Kha-la-chais. According to traditions, oral and written, four autochthonous clans were also there in different localities in the same valley around and adjacent to the Khamul principality. They were the Angoms, Khabas, Moirangs and the Chengleis. As no written history is available, nothing can be said with certainty about the inter-clan relationship which they developed among themselves. But this seems probable that the Indo-Aryan Khamuls, remaining faithful to the Puranic ideal of 'Basudeiva Kutumbakam' i.e., unity of mankind, co-existed with co-operation and fellow feeling. They did not do anything to destroy the local clans and

Origin of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas

their cultures. Rather, they provided a social frame in which the different clans had been able to integrate on the basis of equality. This liberal approach of the Khamuls drew the autochthonous clans closer to them. A synthesis of culture also took place. The autochthons began to observe many of the Brahminical customs, and worship many of its gods and goddesses. On the other hand, the Khamuls also accommodated many of the cultural traits of the autochthons in their own. Thus, Brahminical Hinduism which the Khamuls carried along with them in Manipur accommodated many of the cultural elements of the local clans keeping most of its tenets. This was the Manipuri Hinduism. After this cultural synthesis, the worship of Lord Vishnu became common to all. All the clans assumed the common nomenclatures--'Bishnupriyas' (i.e., darling of Lord Vishnu) and 'Bishnupurias' (i.e., the dwell-ers of territories in and around Bishnupur). In course of time, according to the oral tradition current among the Bishnupriya Manipuris, the five clans-the Khabas, Angoms, Moirangs, and the Chengleis formed a voluntary union or confederacy under the leadership of the Khamuls. It was the Confederacy of Pancha-Bishnupriyas. A noted scholar¹, Mohendra Kumar Singha endorses the same although regarding the names of the component clans he slightly differs. He refers the five component clans as the Khamuls, Angoms,

Luwangs, Moirangs and the Khuwairakphams. Again, the five clans² under reference are mentioned as the Khamuls, Mangangs, Luwangs, Angoms and the Moirangs by Pandit Nabakhendra Singh in his 'Khamul Puran'. Another writer, Shri Nabadwip Singha, who had been in Manipur serving as Asstt. Head-master of Churachandpur High School, Imphal, for about a decade prior to the beginning of the Second World War, found the people of Ningthoukhong, Nachou, Ngaikhong etc. (with whom he had frequent contacts) endorsing the informations of 'Khamul Puran' by their oral statements. On the basis of the testimonial of the Khamul Puran and of the experience thus gathered from the people, the said writer has given the observation thus: "³it should also be noted here that the Bishnupriyas were originally divided into five groups as (1) Khamul, (2) Moirang, (3) Angom, (4) Luwang and (5) Mangang from times immemorial, and are known as such by these names even now. They are also called the Pancha Bishnupriyas."

The existence of this political organisation-- the confederacy of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas in the land in such an ancient time may be a surprise to many scholars, but it is not unhistorical. Among the 'Sudasa Mahajanapadas' (sixteen states) into which, according to the Buddhist chronicles, Northern India was divided during the 6th century B.C., there were some confederacies. The Vrijiis of Mithila formed a confederacy of eight different clans, the most prominent of which were the Lichchhavis who had their capital at Vaisali. Therefore, the formation of the confederacy of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas in Manipur in the ancient period is nothing new.

This state formation in the Manipur Valley is testified by the observations of many scholars. As ⁴Gerini commenting on 'Ptolemy's Geography' rightly observes, "From the Brahmaputra and Manipur to the Tonkin Gulf we can trace a continuous string of petty states ruled by those scions of the Kshatriya race, using the Sanskrit or Pali language in official documents, inscriptions, buildings, temples and other monuments

of the Hindu style, and employing Brahmin priests at the propitiatory ceremonies connected with the court and the state". The observation of Gerini regarding the foundation of petty states by the scions of the Kshatriya race is supported by foreign chronicles and archaeological evidences. According to 'Maharaj Vamsa', the Burmese royal chronicle, Dhajaraja, a king of Sakya race settled in Manipur in about 550 B.C. and later on conquered Upper Burma in a very early period. Archaeological discoveries have also shown the existence of a petty state in Manipur established by the scions of the Kshatriya race. Noted scholar and archaeologist W. Yumjao Singh conducted excavations on an ancient site near Imphal and made significant discoveries. Among the finds he discovered there, special mention may be made of rectangular bronze coins bearing inscriptions in Sanskrit in Devanagari script dated to 107 A.D. Sanskrit was the language of the Indo-Aryan Kshatriyas; and so, its use in the coins clearly indicates that the petty state in Manipur under reference was founded by the Indo-Aryan Kshatriyas. Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee in his essay, ⁵'Political Divisions and Cultural Zones in North-East India' says, "...The Meitei state was preceded by the Indo-Aryan Bishnupur state in a small segment of the valley in the early period". Historian R.M. Nath endorses the same fact and writes, '.....⁶The Kha-la-chais, who call themselves Bishnupriyas are supposed to have been the first ruling race; and the Mei-this or Mei-theis, who call themselves as real Manipuris, are supposed to have been the next immigrants'.

Regarding the period when the land was named 'Manipur', the scholars differ in their opinions. In ancient times, it was known as the land of the 'Gandharvas' or 'Mekholi'. According to the epic Mahabharata and the Puranas, it was the ancient nomenclature of the land. Some believe that it originated from the days of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas. The Pancha-Bishnupriyas felt the necessity of giving the land a common name acceptable to all the component clans. Just as the

Ahoms named the land they conquered (i.e., Assam) as 'Mung-dun-sun-kham' which in Tai language means 'the country full of golden gardens', so also they named their land as 'Manipur' which means the 'land of jewels' -- Mani=Jewel, Pur=city or land. The Gouriya Vaishnava Meiteis also believe that Manipur has been the name of the land since

Antiquity of
nomenclature-
'Manipur'

the ancient times, but the Senamahi Meiteis (Meitei revivalists) do not believe it. 'They try to establish their own tradition. They do not care to find any correlation with the Hindu tradition, - rather, they are more concerned with disowning any association with Hindu tradition'. In their view, the name 'Manipur' of the land is a recent origin. This nomenclature of the land was done only during the 18th century. Dr.K.P.Sinha also supports this view, and he writes⁷, "the term 'Manipur' was attributed to the land, in all probabilities, towards the 18th century A.D. when the land was on way to full Aryanisation". This inference of Dr.Sinha, like the unsound view of the Senamahi Meiteis, seems to be much away from the testimony of the available historical records. All sources of information so far available indicate that this nomenclature of the land was done in the ancient times. The antiquity of this nomenclature of the land is proved not only by its repeated mention in the epic, Mahabharata, but also by its unambiguous references in the Puranas, by its mention in the writings of the classical Greek writers, and by its record in the foreign chronicles. Historian L.Iboongahal Singh endorses the same view and writes, "It is mere nonsense to think that this golden land was recently given the name of Manipur in or about 18th century A.D." It has been the name of the land since the pre-historic times. Anyway, it should be remembered that this name of the land, 'Manipur' is a composite term over which all the ethnic clans have equal rights. It cannot be the monopoly of a particular clan for use whatever dominant it might be.

The Period of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas:

The confederacy of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas dominated the land till the rise of the Meiteis in the Valley which ⁸took place, according to the calculation of a scholar Shyamkanhai Singh, roughly by the end of the 5th century A.D. or the beginning of the 6th century A.D. With the emergence of the Meiteis on the scene, the dominance of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas began to deteriorate. The cohesion which they had earlier, disappeared on account of the development of feuds and conflicts among them on petty matters. As a result, they could not offer united resistance to the Meiteis, who taking advantage of this eliminated them one after another. The elimination of clans became completed by the end of the 17th century A.D. after which the Meiteis remained the undisputed masters of the land.

The Khabas were the first to succumb to the Meiteis. Evidences are there to show that the Khaba chief, Nongjenba was killed and the first Meitei chief Pakhangba usurped their principality. One ⁹reference in the royal chronicle, 'Cheitharol Kumbaba' reveals that the Meitei king Punshiba invaded and conquered the Chengleis. This was the last that was heard about the Chengleis.

The remaining three clans-- the Khamuls, Moirangs and the Angoms still remained powerful enough to defy the Meiteis for a long time. In the clashes and conflicts that followed the Meiteis had to taste defeats and humiliations in more than one occasion in their hands. But

Fall of Khamuls and Moirangs.

their supremacy proved short-lived. An unfortunate event paved the way for their eventual downfall. Khamba, a Khamul prince, fell in love with Thoibi a Moirang princess. Over this, the Khamuls, the Moirangs and the Angoms entered into an infight which left all the three clans so weak and decadent that their downfall became the question of time. The Khamuls who played a glorious role in the political scene of the Valley for centuries, and championed the cause of the Aryan culture there, fell in evil days. Their principality was merged

with the Meitei principality during the reign of Kongyamba (1324 A.D.-1335 A.D.). In the ¹⁰“Khamul Puran” it is stated that the Meitei king managed the murder of its reigning king, Khamul Tumu with the help of his younger brother Khamul Atal and annexed their principality. But the Meitei chronicle gives a different story. Unable to cope with the chaotic state of affairs in his principality, the Khamul king, Aden Lamyai Kaikhinba (perhaps Khamul Atal) voluntarily handed over his principality to the Meitei chief and himself stayed in the capital of the Meiteis for the rest of his life. The Khamul principality thus passed under the sway of the Meiteis. ¹¹Ningthoukhomba (1432 A.D.-1467 A.D.), the Meitei king conquered the Moirangs by killing their king Sanahongba at a place called Moirangthong. Since then the Moirangs also passed under the suzerainty of the Meiteis. With the fall of the Khamuls and the Moirangs, the period of supremacy of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas came to an end by the 15th century A.D. Thenceforward the Meitei supremacy in the land started. The same view has been expressed by N.Khelchandra Singh in his essay, ‘Sources of the History of Manipur’. In it he writes, “by ¹²degrees the Meitei or the Ningthouja group became predominant, and towards the middle of the 15th century almost all the groups inhabiting the hills and the valley passed under the royal umbrella of the Meitei kings”.

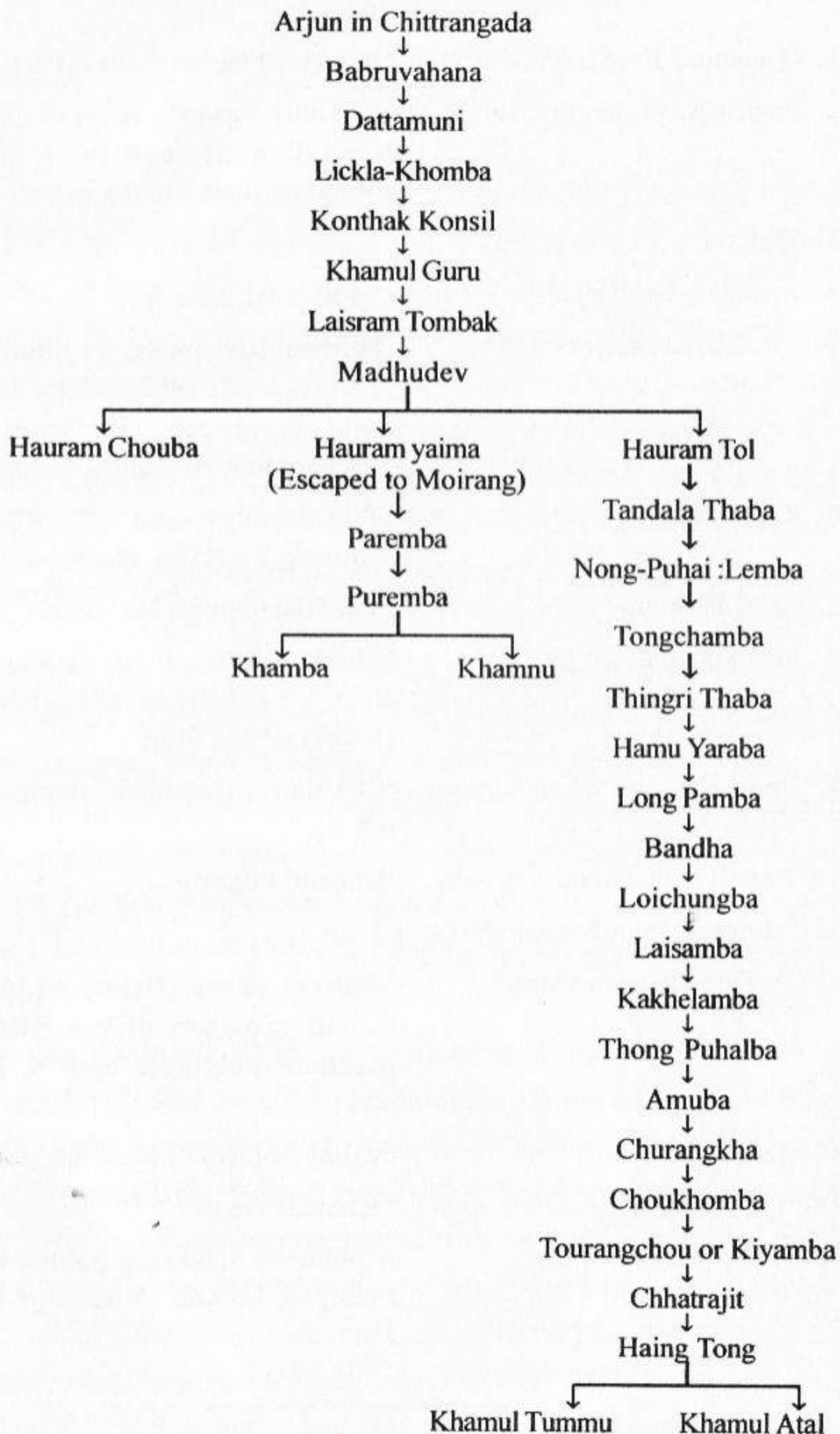
After that the Bishnupriya kings were reduced to mere titular heads in their respective territories by the Meitei Maharajas. Although they were deprived of their independent administrative powers, the Meitei overlords allowed them to exercise their authorities over the religious and social matters of the whole Bishnupriya Manipuri society. The villages in Manipur are uni-ethnic-each village being inhabited by the people of a particular clan. The Bishnupriyas live in villages established in the valley, particularly in the territories around the historic Loktak lake. Shri R.K.Saha¹³, a member of the Anthropological Survey of India, while collecting materials for the compilation of his dissertation, “Valley Society of Manipur” visited 8 (eight) Bishnupriya villages in the valley during the earlier part of the 1970’s. He found the total population of seven out of

these villages as 20,392 (as per the 1961 Census). The population of the eighth village was not included, as it was not recorded in the census concerned being a new settlement at that time. In course of time, however, almost all the Bishnupriyas of Manipur, except those who moved out to the neighbouring valleys of the Brahmaputra, Barak and Surma rivers, and to Tripura, had to keep aside their ethnic identity and language under the pressure of adverse political circumstances, and passed over to the Meitei society. They now have forgotten everything of their own. 'They forgot to worship their gods, and now whatever symbol they maintain and whatever practice they observe are all later adoptions from the Meiteis'.

Each clan might have produced their books concerning their territory, belief and society. Also those books might have contained the history of the clans from the time of their founders till their absorption in the powerful Ningthouja clan. But whatever might be the reason, almost all are unavailable now except a book of the Khamuls, ¹⁴'the Khamul Puran' written by Pandit Navakhendra Singha. This book has also, while passing from generation to generation in private hands, disappeared recently. However, like the re-written copy of the lost royal chronicle, 'Cheitharol Kumbaba', its translated copies in Bengali and English are available. From the translated copies of the book we can form a rough idea about the territory, belief, and society of the Khamul people, and the genealogy of their kings. The genealogy of the Khamul kings as provided in the Puran is given in page 33.

Thus from Babruvahana there were twenty seven generations of Khamul rulers who ruled in succession. However, except the narration of some achievements of rulers, no details about the period of reigns and dates, etc. of the monarchs are not found in the said Puran. Therefore, nothing can be said about them with certainty. But this genealogy of the Khamul rulers is endorsed in an essay in an issue of a monthly magazine of Manipur, ¹⁵'Lalit Manjuri'.

Genealogical Tree of the Khamul Kings :



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 8. Shyamkanhai Singh- 'Cheitharol Kumbaba- as a Source of History', Published in 'Sources of the History of Manipur'
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CHAPTER V

(The Meiteis--the Establishment of their Supremacy)

It has already been discussed earlier that the Tibeto-Burmans, Chin-Kukis and other Mongolian tribes, in course of their migrations in waves during the pre-historic days from the east to the west, left some sections of their peoples on the hilly areas surrounding the valley of Manipur. These remnants of those races in course of time formed distinct clans and tribes there amongst whom special mention may be made of the Meiteis, Mangangs, Chirens, Khendes and many other Chin-kuki

Meiteis and their
original habitation

ones. We have no reliable records to ascertain the exact locations of their respective habitations in the region. However, ¹“among the Meiteis, there is a belief, and a folk tradition as well, that they had their original home at Koubru Hill and Longmaiching Hill”. That the Meiteis were the dwellers of the hills who later on descended on the valley of Manipur is endorsed by Prof. G. Kabui. He writes, ²“it is most likely that the Meiteis as a distinct linguistic, cultural and social group, was formed in the Manipur Valley. And immediately before they settled down in the valley, they must have lived in different places in the surrounding hills as indicated by the clan genealogies and chronicles”.

The Manipur Valley, with its great fertility and favourable topography, is highly congenial for habitation. Hard life in the hills and the scarcities of necessities of living, compelled the people living in the surrounding hills to come down in this rich valley. It was not accomplished at a fixed time – it was accomplished after a continuous process which covered a considerable period of time. First, they came down the hills leading raids on the valley and went back collecting their essential things. But later on they also established their settlements and became permanent dwellers of the valley. This is hinted by the Meitei traditions and endorsed

by the observations of the scholars. According to the Meitei legends, Manipur Valley was covered entirely by water at a time. Mr. Brown Meiteis in the valley speculates that ³“when even a small part of the valley skirting the hills became suitable for cultivation, the hill men bordering the area used to come down, cultivate the land and returned to their mountain homes after reaping the harvests. Gradually when cultivable land increased, some of them settled permanently in the valley”. The Meiteis under the same process might have come down in the valley and became permanent dwellers there.

Over and above the existing Pancha-Bishnupriya principalities of the Khabas, Angoms, Moirangs, the Chengleis and the Khamuls--new clans, some descended from the hills and some other later originated and developed in the valley itself, also established principalities in different regions of the valley. They were the principalities of the Meiteis, Mangangs, Luwangs, Chakpas, Chirens, Khendes, etc. This resulted in the increase in the number of clans in one hand, and a change in the demographic composition of the valley on the other. They were all independent principalities each ruled by the kings of its own dynasties as is evident from the clan genealogies, such as, ‘Cheitharol kumbaba’ Rise of new principalities in the valley. of the Meiteis, ‘Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba’ of the Moirangs, ‘Chakparol’ of the Chakpas, the ‘Chengleirrol’ of the Chengleis, ‘Khumal Kangleirol’ and the ‘Khamul Puran’ of the Khamuls, etc. etc. They are primarily histories of the clans from the time of their foundation till their annihilation and absorption in the powerful Meitei clan. The foundation of new principalities in the valley, therefore, was there, but the important question is -- when ? This question has remained upto now a debatable point among scholars. We have no reliable historical record to answer the question. However, Sri Shyamkanhai Singh has put forward a theory which indirectly gives the answer to the question raised. He has examined the period of reigns of the ‘first eleven Manipur Kings’ shown in the Royal Chronicle,

'Cheitharol Kumbaba', and found those simply unreasonable and unbelievable. He has tried to find out the probable time of the foundation of principalities by the new clans by putting forward a theory. The theory⁴ is that "the total time span covered the reigns of those eleven kings is 275 years taking 25 years as the average time span for the reigns of those kings. As a requirement of this theory, these 275 years are linked with 763 A.D., viz., the date of accession of the 12th king Khongtekcha (c.763 A.D. to 773 A.D.). Now as per his theory, the date of the first Manipur king (Meitei king), Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is in between 488 A.D. and 513 A.D. (763 A.D.-275 years=488 A.D.) Thus the first Meitei king reigned about the beginning of the 6th century A.D. Sri Singh has accepted the year 763 A.D. as the date of accession of the 12th king as assigned in the same chronicle, perhaps because it is supported by the epigraphic evidence. Anyway, from this theory it can safely be assumed that the movement of the clans concerned from the hills to the valley and their subsequent settlement there took place roughly during the 6th or 7th century A.D.

Revival of Conflicts among the Clans:

With the increase in the number of clans, the valley witnessed a complicated political situation. The cooperation and peaceful co-existence which was there, except some minor occasions of tensions, among the Pancha-Bishnupriya clans, was lost during the 6th century A.D. There ensued frequent conflicts among them much to the advantage of the new clans. The ⁵causes of conflict among the clans were mainly two-- one for the possession of the fertile lands and the other, for obtaining mates from the other clans. To this a third cause may be added, and it was the desire of each clan for establishing its supremacy over all other clans of the valley. In the conflict that followed, at one time the Khamuls

Revival of Khamuls (Mayamgs)

emerged more powerful. Around the 7th century A.D. the Khamul chief, Laiphengba (Laisamba according to Khamul Puran) shifted his capital at a place only 18 miles away from

Imphal. This was done by the Khamul king perhaps to have a share of the rich land of Kangla. The Meiteis called this new headquarters of the Khamuls as 'Mayang Imphal', and their king as 'Mayang Ningthou'. Now comes the question-as to why the Meiteis used the term Mayang to mean the Khamuls. 'Most probably the word 'Mayang' was the corrupt form of the Meitei word 'Meyam' which means the numerousness of the people (Me=people, yam=numerous). The same view is expressed by a research scholar, Sri Bidhan Sinha in his book, 'Cultural Heritage of North-East India', and by Mahendra Kumar Singha in his book 'Manipurer Prachin Itihas'. Some, however, opine that the word 'Mayang' is synonymous with the Assamese word 'Bongal' which means foreigners or outsiders. The weight of this opinion is that the Khamuls were foreigners in Manipur or outsiders who entered and stayed in Manipur.

Along with the rise of the Khamuls, other clans - the Moirangs, Angoms, Chengleis, Meiteis and the Luwangs also increased the territorial extents of their principalities by swallowing up the smaller and weaker ones. The first significant achievement of the Meiteis was their victory in a war against the Angoms. During the reign of the Meitei chief, Naothingkhong an incident took place in about 750 A.D. It is believed, one day one of his chief followers was beaten up by an Angom. Naothingkhong immediately despatched an army which chastised the whole community of the Angoms. Again, from the report of Pamberton it is gathered that one brother of the king of Pong (the kingdom of Monguan in Upper Burma), named Santongpha, in course of his raiding expeditions, entered into the territory of the Moirangs towards the end of the 8th century A.D. From the details of the incident it is presumed that with the co-operation of the invading chief, Naothingkhong was able to keep the Moirangs under control for sometime. However, the rising tide of the Meiteis also received a temporary obstruction from the Pongs. They had to remain under the vassalage of the Pongs for a

considerable period. This is endorsed by historian R.M.Nath. He writes, Number of clans reduced to seven. “⁷The Manipur King, Naothingkhong was defeated and the country passed into complete control of the Tais for full ten years. The king sent an embassy to China accompanied by dancers, singers and musicians”. To sum up, in the clashes and conflicts which lasted for about two centuries, the smaller and weaker principalities were occupied by the bigger and stronger ones; and in this process, the number of principalities in the valley was reduced. By the 9th century A.D. seven clans emerged out stronger and prominent there, and they were the Meiteis, Khamuls, Moirangs, Angoms, Chengleis, Luwangs and the Khaba-Nganbas.

It is, however, difficult to ascertain the exact size and boundaries of the principalities of these clans. However, this much is certain that they were independent principalities situated in and around present Imphal, the centre of the valley. At first, the relation among them was peaceful and co-operative. A people of one clan could reside in the principality of another one owing allegiance to the clan in whose territory he desired. Thus a Khamul could live at Moirang and vice-versa. For example, ⁸according to the testimony of the Khamul Puran, Hauram Yaima, brother of the Khamul king, Hauram Tol, and the great grand Early relation among them. father of Khamul prince, Khamba and princess, Khamnu, escaped to Moirang and stayed there. Although the clans maintained their distinct ethnic identities, continuous co-existence paved the way for a synthesis of their cultures. Thus records show that along with the worship of local and traditional gods and goddesses, ⁹Aryan gods and goddesses- such as, Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, etc.were also worshipped there. Temples were built in different places (now almost all except a few disappeared for lack of interest of their preservation), and gods and goddesses were worshipped therein uttering the word ‘Soha, Soha’. This word ¹⁰‘Soha’ porobably, as historian J.Roy believes, is the corruption of the vedic word of reverance ‘Swaha’. Their continuous

co-existence in course of time led to a growth of fellow-feeling and the development of a cultural synthesis as discussed above. This provided the ground for the origin of a new Confederacy of these Seven Clans for dealing with matters of common interest. The Meiteis, being the most prosperous and strongest of them all naturally became its leading clan.

Establishment of Meitei Supremacy:

The peaceful relation between the clans did not last long, and soon they entered into clashes and conflicts with each other. The main causes of conflict this time were the desire of the chief of each clan to become more powerful, and to establish his supremacy over the entire land. In this race, the Meiteis were in the advantageous position. This was because of a special advantage which they had over the other clans. Kangla, an area of the most fertile lands of the valley, was the place of their settlement, and so they had not to worry about their food supplies. In these circumstances they gradually strengthened themselves in military power. This enabled the Meitei chiefs to over-power the chiefs of other clans one after another, and ultimately became supreme over the entire land during the end of the 17th century A.D.

The details of the subjugation of the other clans by the Meiteis, provided by the available sources of information, are not clear and elaborate, but sketchy. The first clan subdued and absorbed by the Meiteis was that of the Khabas. While the Khabas were subdued permanently, the Chengleis and the Luwangs continued to rule independently in their respective principalities. After ruling independently with glory for a considerable period, they also fell victims to Meitei expansionism. In later years, the Luwangs grew weak. They were easily conquered by the Meitei chief and absorbed them into his clan. According to the references in the state chronicle, 'Cheitharol Kumbaba', the Meitei king Punshiba (1404 A.D.-1432 A.D.) invaded and conquered the Chenglei principality.

Unlike the Khabas, Luwangs, and the Chengleis, the three other clans, viz., the Khamuls, Moirangs and the Angoms remained still powerful enough to preserve their independent status against the onslaughts of the Meitei chiefs for a long time. For a time the rising

Fall of Khamuls,
Moirangs and
Angoms.

power of the Khamuls overshadowed the Meiteis. In more than one occasions they had to taste defeats and humiliations at the hands of the Khamuls. But this supremacy of the Khamuls proved short lived. ¹¹An unfortunate development paved the way for their eventual downfall. Khamba, prince of the previously routed Khamul family, fell in love with Thoibi, a Moirang princess. The tie would have been to the political advantage of the Khamuls, Moirangs and the Angoms, but the brother of the Moirang king foolishly resisted the idea on purely personal ideosyncracies. The final result was tragic not only to the young lovers but also to the Moirangs

Khamba-Thoibi
episode

and the Angoms. The pathetic love episode of Khamba and Thoibi forms the subject-matter of the popular ballads in Manipur, and the dresses of the heroic lovers are still preserved as a sacred relic at Moirang.

The internecine conflicts that again ensued left the three clans so weak and decadent that their destruction remained only the question of time. The Khamuls, who played a glorious role in the political scene of the Manipur valley for centuries and who also championed the cause of the Aryan culture there, fell in evil days. Their principality was merged with the Meitei principality during the reign of Kongyamba (circa 1324 A.D.-1335 A.D.). In the ¹²Khamul Puran it is stated that the Meitei king managed the murder of the Khamul king Tumu with the help of his younger brother Khamul Atol, and annexed their principality with the Meitei territory. But the ¹³Meitei chronicle gives a different story. Unable to cope with the chaotic state of affairs in his principality, the Khamul king Aden Lamyai Kaikhinba (perhaps the same Khamul Atol) voluntarily handed over the principality to the Meiteis and himself stayed in the

Meitei capital for the rest of his life. The Khamul principality thus passed under the sway of the Meiteis. Ningthoukhomba (1432 A.D.-1467 A.D.), the Meitei king conquered the ¹⁴Moirangs by killing their king, Sanahongba at a place called Moirangthong. Since then the Moirangs were passed under the suzerainty of the Meiteis.

In this way, all the prominent clans except that of the Angoms were subdued by the Meitei chiefs. The establishment of their supremacy over the land was nearing completion. Only the work left to be done was the consolidation of the achievements so far made and to provide a solid foundation to support the political structure which they were raising on the land. This requirement was also fulfilled by some talented Meitei Achievement of Keyamba kings who came to the throne during the succeeding years. Ningthoukhomba was succeeded by Keyamba (c.1447 A.D.-1508 A.D.). He was also a powerful king; but his significant contribution was there in the realm of consolidation and in administration. For ¹⁵administrative convenience, he divided the Manipur valley into 'Four Panas' viz., Ahallup, Naharup, Khabam and Leipham. He also gave shelter and settlement to many brahmin families who came to Manipur from the neighbouring territories of the west being the victims of Muslim oppression.

The extent of the Meitei principality in Manipur, and its strength and influence in and outside the land were in rapid increase during the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. The Meitei kings maintained relations, both political and matrimonial, with the neighbouring Ahom and Pong kingdoms as testified by the Ahom Buranjis and the Pong Royal Chronicles. In the 16th century we come across the following list of rulers viz., Koirengba, Lainingba, Kabomba, Tangjamba, Chalamba and Mungyamba; but little is known about their activities and achievements.

Khagemba was one of the greatest kings of the Meiteis. According to the calculations of 'Bijoy Panchali' the reign of Khagemba falls in the beginning of the 17th century A.D. He was also a great conqueror and assumed many names according to his victories in wars. That he was the conqueror of the Chinese (Pongs) is gathered from his name itself- 'Khagi = Chinese, Ngamba = conqueror'; and of the Kacharis from his other name Meyanganba- 'Meyang = probably the Kacharis, and Ngamba = Conqueror'. After his victory over the ruler of Kachar, he brought many prisoners among whom there were many Muslims. Khagemba was not only a brave warrior but also a good administrator. For the consolidation of the kingdom he divided it into eight divisions. 'Lallup' or the obligatory service to the ruler was said to have been introduced by him. Under this system every male in the country above sixteen years of age irrespective of caste and creed were liable to serve the state for ten days in forty. This reminds us of the 'Pike system' introduced by the Ahom kings. The continuation of the Aryan cultural influence in the land and in the royal court during his time also is indicated by some of his actions-- patronage given to some Brahmin families who migrated from the west, and building of a temple at Bishnupur.

After Khagemba, the kings--Kunjaoba, Paikhomba and Charairongba ruled the kingdom successfully in succession. ¹⁶Paikhomba (1666A.D.- 1697A.D.), as is described by K. Sabita Devi, was a benevolent ruler who undertook many measures for the welfare of the people. He conducted the reclamation of jungles for making adjustment of the growing population, undertook irrigation schemes in order to prevent damage from flood and draught, and took special care for the development of trade and commerce with the neighbouring countries like Burma, Cachar and Tripura. He is said to be the last king who issued coins in archaic Meitei script.

It is the king Chorairongba (c.1698 A.D.- 1709 A.D.) during whose reign the process of the establishment of the Meitei supremacy in the land was completed. The only powerful clan which so long defied the Meitei supremacy was that of the Angoms. He finally crushed the Angoms and totally merged them into the Meitei community. He, however, considering their abilities, appointed them in high offices in the administration.

Chorairongba
Meitei Supremacy
established.

Thus the six clans --the Khabas, Angoms, Moirangs, Chengleis, Khamuls and the Luwangs,--which originated in different ages and in different regions of the valley, had distinct identities, and ruled independently in their respective well-defined principalities, were brought one after another by the Meitei chiefs under their control and established their suzerainty over the land. The Confederacy of the Seven Clans, the so-called Salai Taret, formed under the leadership of the Meiteis during the 9th century A.D. was thus transformed into the Meitei kingdom. The six clans which the Meiteis subdued were denied of their respective ethnic identities. Thereafter, the Meiteis followed different measures to

Creation of Myths
and legends--
All hoaxes.

consolidate their position. First, they began to propogate that the ancient name of the land was 'Meitei Leipak', land of the Meiteis, and not Manipur which was the later nomenclature of the land. Secondly, they reserved the right to rule over the kingdom thus established to their clan by assuming the new name--'the Ningthoujas' i.e., the ruling clan, and thrust upon the people of the other clan their original 'Meitei' nomenclature to Meiteiaise them. Lastly, for infusing the spirit of integration among the people of the subdued clans, they created new myths and legends that all clans descended from the same Supreme Being, 'Taibang Mapu Sidaba' at the same period. All are hoaxes--fabricated stories the contents of which are unhistorical. History gives the clear witness that the antiquity of the name of the land as Manipur is proved not only by its

repeated mention in the Mahabharata, but also by its unambiguous references in the Puranas, by its mention in the writings of the classical Greek writers and by its record in the foreign chronicles. Again, it is also historical that the clans had their own names, independant principalities, and distinct ethnic identities. They had their respective founders,--for the Meiteis-- 'Pakhangba', for the Khamuls and the Luwangs-- 'Poireiton', etc.,etc. So, they were different peoples, originated in different times in different regions of the Manipur valley, now came under the Meitei suzerainty.

The relation between the conquerors and the conquered, as history gives witness, never grew sweet. The conquerors always fell upon the conquered, and let loose different measures to bring them under their fold. The Meiteis were not an exception to this tendency. Talented persons of the subdued clans were assigned with responsible offices in their administration. To infuse in them a spirit of integration, they created myths and legends in which it was preached that all the clans were the 'salais' (branches) of the same people originated from the same Supreme Being, 'Taibang Mapu Sidaba'. On those who were unwilling, coercive measures were adopted. As a result of all these measures many became Meteiaised adopting Meitei customs and manners, and their way of life. Some, however, for getting royal favour and gaining status in the society, voluntarily passed for Meiteis. In this way a large number of people were absorbed into the Meitei population. Thus their political supremacy was followed by numerical superiority in the valley.

Many people of the Pancha-Bishnupriyas i.e., peoples belonging to the Khamuls, Angoms, Moirangs, Luwangs, and the Chengleis, Meteiaisation remained attached to their traditional identities and refused to be merged into the Meitei population. These remnants, collectively known as the Bishnupriyas, therefore, became the victims of social discriminations and various other acts of persuasion like the

assignment of manial services, etc. by the Meitei monarchs. ¹⁷The Meitei kings-- Keyamba (1447 A.D.-1508 A.D.) and Khagemba (1597 A.D.-1652 A.D.) were said to have employed the Bishnupriyas to supply forage to the royal stables. The Bishnupriyas after playing a glorious role in the history of the land since the pre-historic days fell in evil days. Their ouster from supremacy over the land was completed by the beginning of the 18th century A.D., and since then they were subjected to oppressions and humiliations by the Meiteis who now emerged out supreme over the land. Any way, the Bishnupriyas accepted their surrender of power to the Meiteis as a 'fait accompli' and continued to live on the bosom of their motherland serving the Meitei monarchy, and by sharing all troubles and joys with them. However, they continued to retain their ethnic identities and culture, particularly, their own language.

The Bishnupriyas lost political supremacy, no doubt, but they still continued to dominate the culture of the land. Epigraphic and numismatic evidences clearly show that even the Meitei chiefs continued to observe the Vishnu cult along with their own. Meitei king Khongtekcha's copper plate (799 A.D.) written in archaic Meitei script mentions the name of many popular gods of Manipur as Siva, Durga, Ganesh and Visvakarma. Some monarchs, amongst whom special mention may be made of is Khagemba, who gave encouragement for the constructoin of temples at various places. He is said to have constructed the Vishnu temple at Bishnupur. Cherairongba, father of Pamheiba, is also said to have established a Radha-krishna temple. The Bishnupriya Manipuri language still continued to enjoy the status of the court language. It continued till the reign of Khagemba which, according to the calculation of 'Bijoy Panchali' falls in the middle of the 17th century A.D. Historian ¹⁸R.M.Nath endorses it and writes, ".....Khagemba introduced the Meitei as the court language in the place of Vishnupriya or Khalachais language". Thus the Bishnupriya Manipuri lost political

authority over the land by the end of 17th century A.D. and their language lost royal patronage. Still their language existed on the valley with full dignity till the middle of the 19th century. Historical works written by both the Indian and Western scholars offer irrefutable testimony of its existence. The 'Khamul Puran' by Pandit Navakhendra; 'An Account of the Valley of Manipur' by Maj. McCulloch; the 'Ethnology of Bengal' by Dalton; the 'Linguistic Survey of India' by G.A. Grierson and many other works may be referred to in this connection. Sir Grierson, who made a survey of the languages in the valley during the middle of the 19th century found it there as an active language. One paragraph of one of the folk-tales¹⁹ collected by him (Grierson) in original Bishnupriya Manipuri language in Roman script with its English translation is furnished below :

“Muni agar putak dugo asila. Tanu diyogorangto khula augoi bapokorang matlo, Baba, mi peitou barhan saruk auta diya-de. Tanur bapoke don auta bagiya diya dilo. Koto din thaya putak khulago tar don auta habi loiya durai fam ahanat maje giya tar don auta habi oknai kam kariya mang-koilo”.

Its English version :

“A man had two sons. The younger of the two said to his father, ‘Father, please give me my share of goods which I will receive’. Their father divided the wealth and gave their shares. A few days later, the younger brother, taking his wealth, went to a distant place and wasted all his wealth by doing worthless works”.

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CHAPTER VI
Meitei Period,
Foundation of a New Era:
(1714 A.D. - 1799 A.D.)

Charairongba is succeeded by Pamheiba which took place in 1714 A.D. (according to 'Bijoy Panchali' in 1709 A.D.) His accession to the throne marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Manipur, and it continued till the reign of Joi Singh alias Bhagyachandra (1756 A.D. - 1799 A.D.). This period from 1714 A.D. to 1799 A.D., which covered mainly the reigns of Pamheiba and Joi Singh, is marked by significant political developments and cultural refinement; and so, it may well be considered as the 'Golden Age' of the history of Manipur. First, the shadow, which so long had kept the history of Manipur in darkness, began disappearing. 'Reliable materials in increasing quantity are available from this time'. Secondly, this period witnessed the consolidation of the supremacy of the Meitei clan over the land. Thirdly, an era of warfare and conquest of territories commenced which within a very short time made Manipur a factor of great political importance in the whole region of Eastern India. Lastly, a significant change took place in the realm of religion which, over and above enriching the cultural life, paved the way for the rapid cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India.

Pamheiba alias Garib Niwaz:
(1714 A.D. - 1754 A.D.)

Pamheiba, as established by a number of reliable sources, was a spiritual personality endowed with a revolutionary outlook, the zeal of a conqueror and a strong desire for cultural refinement. But the parentage of this great personality has upto now remained a debatable point among the historians. The debate centres round the question – was he the son or adopted child of Cherairongba whom he succeeded? ¹According to

the findings of Dr. Brown, Pamheiba appears to have been a Naga boy brought up and adopted by Raja Charairongba. As a proof of it, it is said that for his investiture a large number of tribal chiefs were invited, and he wore Naga costumes at his coronation. But almost all the available sources of information deny that Pamheiba was a Naga. Rather, it is maintained that he was a Meitei prince being the eldest son of Charairongba, but brought up under tragic circumstances in the midst of a Naga society. ²It is explained that his use of Naga costumes and friendliness with the Naga chiefs were because of an unfortunate incident of his boyhood. There was a threat of his life during his boyhood. To save the infant prince from the hands of the conspirators, he was sent to a hilly village where he grew up incognito as a tribal boy. When he was seven and the palace deemed safe for him, he was brought back. It is argued that his association thus developed during his infancy made him take kindly to Nagas'.

Whatever might be his origin, but this much is certain that Pamheiba was one of the great rulers of Manipur. He ascended the throne in 1714 A.D. at the age of 20 and assumed the His work of consolidation surname Garib Niwaz, a honourific epithet given to him by the Emperor of Delhi. In order to consolidate his position at home, he persued a policy of friendship and compromise. With this aim in view, he invited all the Naga chiefs at his coronation ceremony. He recieved them with due honour and entertained them with good feasts and wine. He also won over the hearts of the people of the prominent clans of the former 'Confederacy of the Bishnupriyas' who were uprooted and molested by his predecessors. ³Thus we find his re-instatement of the Khamul prince, Maimu Chungkhanba, the great grandson of Tumu, the last powerful Khamul king, to the chieftaincy of the Khamul principality at Bishnupur.

Pamheiba was not only a man of peace; he was, as his series of Burmese invasions proved, a master in the art of warfare as well. The truth of this portion of their historical annals receives most unexpected and satisfactory corroboration from the records of Ava in which all the principal circumstances are narrated nearly as we find them in the chronicles of Manipur. There was traditional enmity between Manipur and Burma for mastery over the Kubo Valley in particular; and over the entire valley of the rivers Chindwin (Ningthee) and Iravati, in general. Very shortly after his accession to the throne, Pamheiba commenced that career of conquest which we find recorded in the Burmese annals. In 1725 A.D., he attacked and defeated Burmese at the mouth of the Maglang river and in the following year repulsed a Burmese army which had penetrated into the valley, and captured three divisions. From 1735 A.D. to 1738 A.D., he again and again crossed the river Ningthee (Chindwin), led repeated invasions and obtained victories in each ventures. As a result, the towns of Matson, Dabayen, and Myedu, and the ancient Burmese capital of Sagang came under the occupation of Pamheiba. But the invasion which he launched with the Cacharis in 1739 A.D. ended in failure. He suffered heavy losses and was compelled to retire to the strongholds of his own country. After this disaster, he remained inactive for a period.

After a long gap of ten years, Pamheiba again crossed the Ningthee river with a large army in 1749 A.D. and encamped near the confluence of the Chindwin and Iravati rivers. He was awaiting for an opportunity to cross the river Iravati and attack the capital of Ava, but an unhappy incident caused Pamheiba to change his mind. During the night his standard was blown down. Taking it to be a bad omen he preferred to make peace. He concluded peace with the king of Ava, presented him a daughter and began to retreat to his country following the road of Myedu. When he reached the mouth of Maglang river, he was met by his son, Ajit Shah alias Kakeelalthaba. Ajit Shah rebuked

his father for the termination of the invasion and the conclusion of the humiliating treaty, and revolted against him. As a result of these remonstrances, Pamheiba was deserted by all but 500 men. At this condition, finding no other alternative, Pamheiba went back to the court of Ava and solicited help from the king of Ava against his rebellious son. Fortune seemed to desert him altogether. The kingdom of Ava itself was by the mean time destroyed by the Peguers (a people of Southern Burma). Pamheiba then made an attempt to re-enter Manipur. At the mouth of the Maglang river, he was met by the emissaries of Ajit Shah and was cruelly murdered together with his eldest son, Shyam Shah and all the principal men of his court who followed him. Thus ended in an inglorious way the career of the great warrior king of Manipur.

Again Pamheiba was not only a great conquerer but also a religious reformer. His reign witnessed the introduction of Vaishnavism in Manipur. It is said that "Santadas Goswami, a wise saint and propagator of the Ramauti school of religion, came to Manipur from the west. The king, being inspired by the teachings of the saint, embraced the new religion and directed the people to follow the same path'. This was how, as all accounts of Manipur agree, Vaishnavism of the Ramauti sect entered Manipur. Its introduction in course of time enriched the Manipuri culture by effecting a cultural synthesis. Ancient gods and customs were continued to be attended to side by side with Vaishnavism. He worshipped Sri Rama as the principal deity. Present Hanuman temple of Mahabali and the idol of Hanuman worshipped therein-- all were of his time. During his reign, the epics-Ramayana & Mahabharata were translated into Meitei language. The ideal of love adored by the people in their popular anecdotes-- "Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi", "Khamba and Thoibi", etc., found support and reorientation in

Introduction of Vaishnavism.

Vaishnavism. But in some people a fear developed that the progress of the new faith might overshadow their existing creed and culture. Accordingly, one Khongnangthaba with his

followers tried to stem the tide of Vaishnavism in Manipur, ‘⁵The account of this event given by the pundits ends with a tragic conclusion. The king, enraged by this opposition, ordered all the scriptures of the old religion to be burnt’. Manipur to-day is thus deprived of her valuable old religious and historical literatures which might have thrown much light on the unknown past of the land. But so far no evidence has been found regarding the burning of old scriptures and suppression of the old faith by him.

As regards his treatment to the Bishnupriyas, it was fine in the beginning. After his conversion to Vaishnavism, he began to treat the Bishnupriyas with favour perhaps considering them as co-religionists. This was not viewed with pleasure by his Meitei courtiers who suspected that it was under their influence that the king turned his face against their

Bishnupriyas humiliated

age-old customs and beliefs. So, they began to exert constant pressure on the king to change his mind. At last it worked, the king in his later years became changed and indulged in anti-Bishnupriya activities. The king accordingly reduced the Bishnupriyas to a ‘degraded class, and assigned them various menial services.

Pamheiba’s reign was a period of achievements. He was a talented administrator. By undertaking a number of coercive measures he subordinated the people of other clans to the Meiteis, and thus consolidated the establishment of the Meitei supremacy over the land. He was also a great warrior and defeated the Burmese army more than

His achievements

nine times and the Tripuris three times during his reign. These victories increased the international prestige of Manipur to a great extent. His reign opened a new chapter in the socio-religious lives of the people of Manipur.

Condition of Manipur after Pamheiba :

The death (rather murder) of Pamheiba was followed by a period of chaos and anarchy in the kingdom. Manipur, already weakened by

the death of Pamheiba, became weaker due to the feuds and acts of enmity of the worst type let loose by his sons. Their senseless bloodsheds darkened the pages of the history of the country. Pamheiba had two queens. By his eldest queen he had a son named Shyam Shah; and by the second he had six viz., Ajit Shah, Nung Shah, Tong Shah, Sabyasachi, Bharat Shah and Satrughna Shah. Ajit Shah, the most selfish and ambitious of all, committed the most heinous crime--murder of his father and elder brother, Shyam Shah and occupied the throne. But the dark deeds by which he cleared his way to the throne made him extremely unpopular. Taking advantage of his unpopularity, Bharat Shah, his younger brother created an adverse situation for him in the country. Unable to cope up with this hostile situation, Ajit Shah after five years rule, vacated the throne and went out of the country. Accordingly, Bharat Shah ascended the throne with the tacit consent of the people. He was, however, not destined to rule for a longer period. He died shortly after a reign of two years in 1757 A.D. This time all the 'Rajas' of Manipur (31 in number) assembled and as a measure of ensuring peace and tranquility in the country, proclaimed in 1758 A.D. the two sons of unfortunate Shyam Shah--Gour Shah and Chingthong Khomba alias Joi Singh as Maharajas who were to rule the country alternately. After the death of Gour Shah in 1764 A.D., the sole authority fell on his younger brother Chingthong Khomba alias Joi Singh.

Joi Singh alias Chingthong Khomba :
(1758 A.D.- 1799 A.D.)

Joi Singh, son of Shyam Shah and the grandson of the illustrious monarch Pamheiba, ruled the country first as one of the Joint-Rajas and then as the sole Maharaja of Manipur from 1758 A.D. to 1798 A.D. He was brave, intelligent and extremely religious. His charming appearance, pleasing countenance, impartial attitude and devotion to religion earned for him great popularity. The people lovingly called him

'Karta Maharaja'. But it is the irony of fate that this monarch with rare qualities of head and heart could not enjoy his rule peacefully and continuously. He had to go in exile many a times in the neighbouring territories for safety. Immediately after his accession to power, he was confronted with serious problems--internal and external. So far as the internal problems were concerned, the most dangerous one was the activities of his banished uncle, Ajit Shah. He was conspiring with the English for help to recapture the throne. On the other hand, there was the repeated Burmese invasions which kept the country in a state of constant chaos and confusion.

His dealings with Burmese invasions :

Finding no other alternatives to face the problems successfully, Joi Singh deputed his Vakil, Haridas Goswami with a letter to Mr. Verelst, the Chief of the English Fac-tory at Chittagong proposing two things to the English--not to favour Ajit Shah who was guilty of parricide, and to help him against the Burmese. His diplomatic manoeuvre bore fruit. The English, who also viewed with great concern this rapid growth of

Anglo-Manipur treaty of 1762 A.D.

Burmese power, accepted the proposals. Accordingly, Mr. Verelst withdrew all communications with Ajit Shah and promised to help Joi Singh against the Burmese. ⁷A treaty was signed on the 14th Sept. 1762 A.D. and this is the first formal agreement between the Government of Manipur and the British Company's authority in India. According to the terms of the treaty, it was promised to Joi Singh that a contingent of British troops of the strength of six companies of Sepoys, would be sent to his aid in his effort to recover those territories wrested from Manipur by the Burmese. In return, Govt. of Manipur agreed to grant forever to the English a rent-free land of 8 thousand cubits at a suitable place in Manipur for the installation of a factory and a fort, and also to provide every facility for the promotion of trade with China. The Government of Manipur in its eagerness to get British help,

not only agreed to pay the expenses of the British troops but also promised to fully compensate the loss suffered by the British at the island of Negrais. A clause of offensive and defensive alliance was also included in the treaty. The terms of the treaty were duly approved of by the Board, of which Mr. Vansittart, the Governor of Bengal was the President.-----According to the terms of the treaty in Jan. 1763 A.D. Mr. Verelst at the head of an English detachment proceeded towards Manipur to help Joi Singh against the Burmese. He went upto Khaspur but could not proceed further because of incessant rain and unhospitable topography, and returned from there with his detachment.

Bad luck thus deprived Joi Singh of the English help. It became impossible for him to resist the repeated Burmese invasions. Being defeated in the hands of the Burmese in 1765 A.D., he escaped to Cachar, and from there to Rongpur, the capital of the Ahoms. There, according to the 'Tungkhungia Buranji', an original account of the history of Assam, Joi Singh gave his daughter, 'Kuranga Nayani' in marriage with the Ahom king, Rajeswar Singh and developed friendly relation with him. After this marriage, he requested Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh to help him to secure the throne from the Burmese. Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh agreed to help him, and an army was sent in 1765 A.D. through the jungles over the Choraideo Hills. The army proceeded clearing their way by cutting the jungles. But they lost the way and failed to reach Manipur. Eventually the army had to fall back. This is known in the history of Assam as the 'Lata Kata Ran'

Again, another army was sent in 1767 A.D. This time, after some preliminary failures, Joi Singh was able to reach Manipur with the Ahom army. There he was helped by many Naga chiefs. He also got the willing support of all sections of the Manipuris. Manipuris, being terribly tortured by the invading Burmese army, and also being the helpless victims of a serious on-going flood, looked upon Joi Singh as their saviour and

promised to help him in all possible ways to re-capture the throne. Backed by all these favourable conditions, Joi Singh was able to re-capture the throne. But the Burmese invasions did not cease. The Burmese forces compelled Joi Singh to go in exile twice again. ⁹At last he came to an understanding with the Burmese king, Bo-daw-Paya; according to which he was allowed to remain in quite possession of his devastated country.

Peace with
Bo-daw-Paya,
the Burmese king.

Maharaj Joi Singh maintained friendly relation with the Ahoms even after the death of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh. He continued to maintain matrimonial and political alliances with the subsequent Ahom monarchs. He gave a daughter of the elder brother of 'Kuranganayani' in marriage with Swargadeo Lakshmi Singh. He also helped Swargadeo

Continuation of
relation with the
Ahoms.

Gaurinath Singh with an army to suppress the rebellion of the Moamarias. His army gave battle to the Moamaria rebels and compelled them to disperse. He, however, hurried back to Manipur leaving about a thousand of his army with the Ahoms.

Internal Developments :

The reign of the 'Karta Maharaja', like the reign of Chandragupta II alias 'Vikramaditya', the great Gupta ruler of ancient India, and of Kumar Vaskarvarman of Kamrupa, constituted a landmark in the history of Manipur. Under his rule, peace and tranquility came in the country. The ground was prepared for the return of prosperity in the land. It also witnessed some important internal developments. It was during his reign that the Khamuls, one of the dominant component clans of the Manipuri society, became divided, as is evident from the ¹⁰'Manipur Pankhiba

Division of the khamuls
into Ningthounais (Rajar
gang) and Leimanais
(Madoi Gang)

Puran' into two groups--the Ningthounais and the Leimanais. Those who cultivated the King's farm were called the Ningthounais and the others who cultivated the Queen's farm were called Leimanais.

The Ningthounais lived in the villages--Ningthoukhong, Nachau, Ngaikhong, etc.,--all situated in the south-western side of the Loktak lake; while the Leimanais lived in the villages of the eastern side of the said lake, namely, Khangabok, Heiruk, Kakching, etc., The Bishnupriyas call the villages of the Ningthounais as 'Rajar Gang' and those of the Leimanais as 'Madoi Gang'. In Bishnupriya language 'Raja' means King, 'Madoi'-Queen, and 'Gang'--village. The head-quarter of the Ningthounais (Rajar Gang) was at Ningthoukhong and that of the Leimanais (Madoi Gang) at Khangabok. The same information is provided by T.D.Hudson in his book, 'The Meitheis'. He observes, "at Ningthoukhong where resides the 'Piba' or the head of the Khamul clan, we have, in order of precedence--the Ningthous, the Senapati, Mantri, etc.,... The same officials of the same order existed at the village of Khangabok".¹² This fact received further confirmation in the observation of another scholar, Sena Singha. He observes, 'in this way the Khamul kingdom came under the rule of two kings--the one was Kirtidwaja (Kalaraja) and the other one was Anandaram. The cause he mentions for this was, however, different.

Once Maharaj Joi Singh went on a visit to Dacca Dakshin, and there he came in contact with Ramnarayan Shiromoni, a descendent of Upendra Mishra, the grand father of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He was very much impressed by his exposition of the ideals of Sri Chaitanya Deva and persuaded him to come to Manipur. Accordingly he came, preached the ideal of Gaudiya Vaishnavism which gained much popularity

Origin of
Rasa-Lila.

among the Manipuris within a very short time. Joi Singh himself got converted to this faith and made it the state religion in place of 'Ramauti Cult' which was patronised by Pamheiba. He began building the temple of Govindaji in his palace, and when it was completed he assumed the title of 'Bhagya Chandra'. In the temple of Govindaji regular daily prayers in songs and dances started. Out of these songs and dances emerged an extremely devotional form of dance. This is the

history of the origin of the famous 'Rasa Dance' of Manipur. It in course of time developed into perhaps the best of all classical dances of India. Its specialities are the gentle 'mudras' and movement of the body in the rhythms created by the sweet beats of 'Manjira' and 'Mridang'.

Along with renovation of religion and innovation in dance, mention may be made of the improvement of agriculture. This was affected by a historic incident. It is said that during the reign of Joi Singh, a group of sixty-five Bengali-speaking families of south-east Bengal led by a certain prince Dhanapati Rajkumar, who is later known as Koireng Khullakpa, entered into Manipur. No definite records are available by which we can ascertain the causes and date of their migration. The migration took

The Koireng
Khullakpa.

place most probably because of two factors. It may be, the people of this group were orthodox Viashnavas. Their dislike to co-habitation with the Muslims (at that time Bengal was swiftly becoming a Muslim land), in one hand, and the liberal attitude of Maharaj Joi Singh towards the Vaishnavas and Vaishnavism, on the other, perhaps prompted them to leave their home and to come to Manipur. Later on, realising their improved method of cultivation, they were given settlement in a place in the valley. Perhaps, it was these people who were the introducers of the method of wet-cultivation hitherto unknown to the people of Manipur. The migration took place during the second half of the 18th century A.D., and hence it obviously falls during the reign of Joi Singh. But ¹³Dr. K.P.Sinha recorded that the migration took place during the reign of Pamheiba whose rule falls during the second quarter of the 18th century A.D. Anyway, they were a small group of people of the Indo-Aryan culture and language. In the valley they came in contact with the Bishnupriya Manipuris who were living on the land in large numbers for centuries since the ancient times. They also belonged to the same Indo-Aryan racial stock. Hence in course of time they got thoroughly merged with the Bishnupriya Manipuris and swelled their numerical strength. In the process these later immigrants lost their identity and

language and thus became Bishnupriyaised. But the view of Sena singha¹⁴ that “.....the Bishnupriyas of Manipur are not the original community of Manipur; they are the descendents of the sixty-five families of Rangamati of present Bangladesh (former Bengal) who were brought in Manipur by one Dhanapati Rajkumar, the so-called Koireng Khullakpa prince”, is based on a mere concocted story. This is completely un-historical and therefore, this view is totally unacceptable.

Another small ethnic community of the Muslims also entered into Manipur but it is not clearly known when and how they entered. Some say they were the decendents of the war-prisoners brought into Manipur by its victorious rulers, while some other say that they entered into the land in search of fortune and new home-lands. Whatever might be the cause of their migration but this is certain that the Bishnupriya

Pangans Manipuris there, remaining true to the Vaishnava (Hindu) tradition, kept themselves away from this people who profess a different religion. It should be mentioned that there are no Muslims among the Bishnupriya Manipuris. However, the Meiteis allowed matrimonial relations with them but did not absorb them in their society. But as because these people (Pangans) gave up their own tongue (of course not their religion), and adopted Meitei Manipuri language, they fondly call them¹⁵ ‘Meitei Pangans’.

Joi Singh alias Bhagya Chandra in his later years became extremely religious. In his old age, he decided to go to Nabadwip and spend the remaining years of his life in religious pursuit. But there was at that time no permanent residence for the rulers of Manipur. However, he managed a plot of land there from the then Governor General, Lord Mornington and built a residence there. After staying for sometime at Nabadwip, he proceeded by boat to visit Brindaban, but on the way he met his death in 1799 A.D.

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CHAPTER VII

**Post-Joi Singha Period:
(1799 A.D. to 1834 A.D.)**

Turmoil over succession:

After the glorious reign of Joi Singha, the history of Manipur entered into a period of chaos and confusion again. It was marked by serious internal troubles and foreign aggressions. Maharaj Joi Singha had eight sons- Sanahal, Rabindra Chandra, Madhu Chandra, Tulasijit, Chourajit, Marjit, Daoji and Gambhir Singh. There was no good-feelings among the princes. They quarrelled among themselves, and everyone tried to secure the throne for himself. As a result, the period from the date of abdication of Maharaj Joi Singh, i.e., from 1799 A.D. upto the beginning of the first Anglo-Burmese war, was strained with fratricidal wars. To make the situation worse, there came the fresh Burmese incursions into the land.

As prince Sanahal predeceased him, Maharaj Joi Singha had placed his second son on the throne in 1788 A.D. before he left for Nabadwip. But after three years of rule, he was murdered in 1801 A.D. Then Joi Singha's third son, Madhu Chandra occupied the throne. But he also could not withstand the conspiracy of his brothers, and accordingly he fled to the neighbouring kingdom of Cachar. The next turn came for Chourajit. He tried with his utmost sincerity to make his position secure by making conciliations with his brothers but failed. His younger brother Marjit secured the help of the Burmese king Bodaw-Paya by promising to renounce the claim of Manipur over the Kubo Valley, and even to acknowledge the overlordship of the Burmese. Thus with the blessings of the Burmese, he ascended the throne of Manipur in 1812 A.D. Realising that his position became insecure, Chourajit along with his youngest brother Gambhir Singh fled to Cachar. On the other hand, out of gratitude, Marjit gave predominance to the Burmese in the

affairs of the state. Some Burmese fashions, including the 'dragon' as the state emblem were introduced. But his dependence on Burma and introduction of Burmese fashion disgusted his people. This adverse feeling of his people became apparent at the time of his invasion of Cachar in 1818 A.D. He despatched a big army against the Kachari king Govinda Chandra, who in his turn sent a Kachari army under Chourajit and Gambhir. When Marjit's army came to know that they would have to fight against their own princes, they became inactive. Marjit was quick to realise the workings of their mind and so hurried back to Manipur to prevent further calamities.

On the other hand, the relation between the Burmese and Marjit became strained over one incident. Once Marjit allowed his people to collect forest materials from the Kubo valley which he earlier had surrendered to the Burmese. The old Burmese Emperor Bo-Daw-Paya naturally became enraged but before he could take any action, he died in 1819 A.D. His successor Bag-Yi-Daw called for Marjit at his court. Sensing troubles ahead, Marjit fled to Cachar.

The three Manipuri brothers in their exile at Cachar made up their differences and united together. Then they resorted to a very ungrateful act against their host, Govinda Chandra who had given them shelter at the time of their need. They drove him out and occupied the whole of Cachar and divided it among themselves. Chourajit ruled the tract east of Tilain hill from Sonaimukh; Gambhir Singh got the land west of Tilain which he ruled from Gumra, and Marjit ruled Hailakandi from Jhapirband. The cohesion between the brothers did not last longer. Gambhir Singh occupied the whole of Cachar. Marjit submitted to him but Chourajit fled to Sylhet. The Kachari king, poor Govinda Chandra, being helpless before these developments, appealed to the English for help but his appeal went in vain.

Activities of Manipuri princes in Cachar.

First Anglo-Burmese war and the rise of Gambhir Singh (1824 A.D. to 1826 A.D.):

At this critical juncture, the Kachari king, Govinda Chandra appealed to the Burmese to save his kingdom from the three ungrateful brothers of Manipur. Thereupon the Burmese Emperor Alaung-Paya sent his forces from all directions to Cachar. Gambhir Singh appealed to the English for help, but the English hesitated for some time to take action. It was only when the Burmese carried their atrocities on their own territories, they declared war against the Burmese in 1824 A.D. Thus followed the first Anglo-Burmese war. To enlist the support of Manipur against the Burmese the English sought to solve the succession problem of Manipur. They called together the three brothers--Chourajit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh and prepared the following arrangements: Chourajit to be the 'Raja', with Marjit the 'Yubaraj' and successor, and Gambhir Singh the 'Senapati' or General-in-chief. It is said that Chourajit and Marjit on account of age refused to accept this arrangement. Accordingly, Gambhir Singh was chosen as 'Raja' and Nar Singh, a great-grandson of Pamheiba, as 'Senapati'; Chourajit receiving a monthly pension of Rs.100/-per month from the British Government went to Nabadwip. Similarly Marjit also got a pension of Rs.100/- per month and settled in Sylhet. After that, an agreement was signed in 1824 A.D., according to which Gambhir Singh was recognised as 'Raja' of Manipur and Nar Singh, a great-grandson of Pamheiba, as his 'Senapati'. After this agreement regarding the future political set up of Manipur, Gambhir Singh and Nar Singh taking all their men with them went to Badarpur camp to receive military training. Expenses of training of this Manipur levy were entirely borne by the British Government.

When everything was complete, Gambhir Singh began his march towards Manipur on 17th May, 1825. He was accompanied by Lieutenant Pamberton, who had volunteered for the expedition. After a

march of great difficulty and privation, often through torrents of rain, he emerged on the valley of Manipur on 10th June, 1825. The Burmese

Gambhir Singh's operations against the Burmese.

thereupon retreated from the town of Imphal and the adjoining villages to a place called Undra, about ten miles to the south. But here too, the Burmese made no stand, - and as soon as the advance of the Manipur Levy was continued, they again fled and left the place altogether.

'The inclemency of the season and the dearth of supplies made it impossible for the whole force to remain in Manipur. So Gambhir Singh returned with the bulk of his followers to Sylhet, leaving a detachment to guard Manipur, aided by some of the inhabitants whom he had provided with arms'.¹

On the 4th Sept., he again set out for Manipur and reached the capital in a fortnight. There were no Burmese there, but a considerable number of them occupied a stockade at Tamu in the south-east corner of the valley. By a clever strategem, he compelled the enemy to leave the place. Afterwards Gambhir Singh occupied the Kubo Valley and proceeded triumphantly upto the bank of the river, Ningthi.

Meanwhile operations of the British army in Burma itself had been crowned with complete success. The English forces under Major Campbell were proceeding successfully from the south to the north. The Burmese were hemmed in from all corners. All chances of their resistance vanished. At last the Burmese Emperor was compelled to accept the terms of peace offered to him. Accordingly the treaty of Yandabo was signed on the 24th Feb., 1826 by which the Burmese emperor recognised Gambhir Singh as the Raja of Manipur, promised not to enter into the affairs of the kingdom in future, and surrendered the coastal territories of Arakan, Tennasserim and Pegu to the English besides the payment of a war indemnity of rupees one lakh.

Treaty of Yandabo.

Although, as Dr.H.K. Barpujari ² has observed, "...the fidelity of Gambhir Singh, the Manipuri prince, felt previously not above suspicion, he had rendered valuable services in driving the Burmese out of Cachar and Manipur". Again, the English were haunted by the likelihood of another war with the Burmese. In such an eventuality the English hoped to put Manipur as a bull-work against them because they now clearly realised that the Manipuris are imbued with all the military spirits that distinguishes the Rajput tribes of northern Hindustan. All these considerations prompted the English to remain faithful to their commitment given in the agreement of 1824. Accordingly by the treaty of Yandabo, Gambhir Singh was restored to the throne of Manipur with the status of a sovereign ruler and allowed him to maintain an army of 3000 to be trained and equipped by the British Government.

Reign of Gambhir Singh. (1826 A.D. to 1835 A.D.)

Gambhir Singh was comparatively black in complexion than all his brothers, and for this reason, it is said, his father used to avoid his companionship. But he was undoubtedly the most energetic, resourceful and bravest of all his brothers. He was not only brave and adventurous, but also tactful and diplomatic. He was a good leader of men and he had demonstrated this quality during his operations against the Burmese. But he was always unscrupulous, ready to use all possible means, fair or foul, to gain his objectives.

Since the early 1827 A.D., Gambhir Singh had been pursuing a policy of slow and steady penetration into the area west of the river Barak which formed hitherto the boundary between Manipur and Cachar. The region was abounded in excellent timbers besides valuable ivory, wax, grass and bamboos. The valuable forest products could profitably

be conveyed along the rivers that flow through it to the eager customers in the markets of Sylhet, Chhatak and Nabiganj. Moreover, it was

His attempt to
occupy Cachar

probably understood by Gambhir Singh that under better management, Cachar would become the granary of the surrounding regions, and thus affording adequate supplies to the Manipurian country. Prompted by these considerations, he claimed the Chandrapur 'ilaka'/(region) of Cachar. However, his claim was backed by no records. At this stage, under advice from Supreme Government, Mr.Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, had to intervene. He summarily dismissed the claim but conciliated Gambhir by assigning 50 'kulbah'³ of land in the same tract. Govinda Chandra, being helpless reluctantly agreed to this loss of his territory. On the other hand, the aquisition of this territories increased the appetite of Gambhir Singh for more territories. He was bent upon grabbing the whole of Cachar if opportunity provided.

On April 24, 1830, a gang of Manipuris in collaboration with some attendants entered into the royal appartments, killed Govinda Chandra along with several members of his family and set fire to the palace. After this murder of Govinda Chandra, several claimants at once put forward their claims over Cachar. But the most serious claim was that of Gambhir Singh, who applied for lease of Cachar for 20 years on an annual tribute of Rs.1500. His claim was supported by Capt. Grant, but seriously opposed by Capt. Jenkins and Lt.Pamberton who pointed out that it would be dangerous to entrust the defence of Cachar to the weak rule of Manipur. Thereupon Lord William Bentinck decided in favour of its annexation to the British Indian Empire. A hilly tract in the eastern part of Cachar was given to Gambhir Singh, the plains were annexed to the British Indian Empire in 1832 and formed into a district.

Formerly, the kings of Manipur had their sway extended even over the interior of the Naga hills. But during the period of decadence, just before and during the Burmese war of 1918-25, whatever influence Manipur had over it was gone. However, a circumstance favoured him to regain control over the Nagas. With a footing gained in Manipur, the

Conquest of
Naga hills.

English thought of a plan to open a road from Manipur to the nearest district of Sibsagar in Assam which had already become one of their strongholds. A reconnoitre partly consisting of Lt. Pamberton, Capt. Jenkins and Capt. Gordon started from Manipur in 1831 to find out the possibility of opening a new road through the Naga hills. They were opposed at every station by the Nagas. To help this new ally, Gambhir led an expedition against the Nagas in 1834, and brought the whole country between Manipur and Assam under his control. In co-memoration of this victory, he installed a stone slab dated Saka 1754 10th Magha (Jan, 1833) with the 'dragon insignia' and footprints of Govindaji inscribed on it on a hillock in the centre of present Kohima town.

Gambhir Singh then opened the road from Imphal to Assam on condition that the British Government would agree to cede a part of the forest below the Naga hills to him where he proposed to establish a colony and a fort at the northern end of Nichu-garod / (Nichu-lower, Garod-fort). However, the untimely death of Gambhir Singh in 1835 left the proposal unrealised.

The English all along, for strategic reasons, maintained good relations with Gambhir Singh. They used to avoid all confrontations with him. When differences occurred on a particular issue, they did not defy his opinions instantly. Either they showed some indulgence to him or

Loss of Kubo
valley.

convinced him to come to a healthy conclusion. Once such difference of opinion occurred over the control of Kubo Valley. During the military operations, Gambhir Singh occupied the valley

and claimed it as his own. But the Burmese Government refused to agree to its occupation by Gambhir claiming that it was a part of the Burmese Empire. There came a fear of renewal of hostilities which the British Government tried to avoid. After repeated negotiations, the British were able to convince Gambhir Singh that the surrender of Kubo valley to the Burmese authority was necessary for maintaining peace and amity in the region, and consequently Gambhir Singh agreed to hand over Kubo valley to the Burmese authority. Accordingly, it was surrendered to the Burmese in 1834. In order to compensate for this territorial loss, Gambhir Singh was provided a stipend of Rs.500/- per month.

Gambhir Singh died in 1835. His services to Manipur were immense and invaluable. He liberated the country from the Burmese yoke. Not only that, he extended the area of the country over a part of Cachar and the Naga hills. Above all, he restored peace and created a congenial atmosphere for the return of the people who left the land in the wake of the Burmese invasions. Like Maharana Ranjit Singh of Punjab, he had the farsight to realise the potential strength of the British, and hence he continued to maintain good relations with the British throughout his reign. He was the worshiper of Lord Krishna. During his

His achievements.

reign, he introduced some religious festivals like Rathayatra, Purnayatra, Gostha Asthami, etc. According to the Royal Chronicle of the state, he introduced the famous festival of Rathayatra (the Meiteis call it 'Kang Chingba') in Manipur in 1833 A.D. after he had witnessed it during his Sylhet visit. Since then, it became the major festival of the Hindu Manipuris. All the Hindu Manipuris settling in the North-eastern region of India and those in the northern province of neighbouring Myanmar also celebrate it with pomp and gaiety. It is usually celebrated for nine days with the traditional feasting of 'Khichri' in the Mandaps (religious structures like Assamese Namghars). 'Sajinba' dance-drama of Lord Krishna (of his boyhood)

is also one of those festivals introduced by him. To sum up, ⁴“Raja Gambhir Singh was not only a great warrior but also a good administrator as well as a religious reformer.

Burmese invasions and flight of the people :

The tiny north-eastern Indian state of Manipur situated adjacent to Burma, the land of the war-like ‘Shan’ people. Naturally, since the rise of Burma into a united and powerful state, Manipur had been the victim of her aggressions. The relations between these two neighbouring countries used to remain far from friendly most of the time. Burmese armies ravaged the land times without number. Our first record of those invasions dated back to 1562 AD when Bagi-Maung, the most powerful of the Toungo dynasty reduced Manipur to a tributary state. But subsequently she asserted her independence, and even made occasional raids on the Burmese territories. In the year 1725 Pamheiba was able to make first of the series of raids against the kingdom of Burma. But shortly after the death of Pamheiba, the Burmese army entered and conquered Manipur in 1758 A.D. From 1758 A.D. to 1826 A.D., within this period of 68 years, Manipur was overrun and dominated by the Burmese again and again. These successive Burmese invasions came to an end with the termination of the First Anglo-Burmese war in 1826.

As usual the Burmese invasions brought destruction to the land and innumerable miseries to the people. Over and above killing of hundreds and thousands, many people were carried away as captives. As a result, the country became extremely depopulated. When the Burmese finally left the land, her male population was found less than 3000 only. Secondly, her resources were carried away by the victorious army. Her industries were destroyed and agriculture was completely dislocated. In short, Manipur, a land of wealth, became impoverished beyond imagination. Lastly, the Burmese were well-known for their ferocity and cruelty. Their cruelty and torture made no distinction of age

and sex. So fearful and terrible their torture was that, it is said, many women, hearing the Burmese advances, ran away in a hurry carrying unconsciously pillows taking them as their babies. Hundreds and thousands of people belonging almost to all the clans escaped to the neighbouring territories in Barak valley, Tripura and Surma valley. While escaping out of the land, they followed the same land routes which their fore-fathers followed in ancient times while entering the land. The entire valley presented a very desolate and gloomy appearance.

The flight of the people was neither sudden nor accomplished at a time. It took place in batches and waves in different times. In the process, some went to north Assam, some to Burma but the majority of them moved out through the south of the country. In course of their movement towards the south, some settled in the narrow valleys between

Manipuri colonies at Barak Valley, Tripura and Surma Valley.

the hills of Jiribam, but the bulk of these people still proceeded further south and developed colonies in the neighbouring territories in the Barak Valley of Assam, in Tripura, and in the Surma Valley of modern Bangladesh. Their major colonies in the Barak Valley were established at Lakhipur, Chandpur, and in the Banraj and Bikrampur parganas of modern Cachar District; at the Jhapirband region of Hailakandi District; and at Pratapgarh and Singla regions of Karimganj District. In Tripura they concentrated at Dharmanagar, Kailashahar, Kamalpur and Bishalgarh regions. Among the people who moved to the Surma Valley in modern Bangladesh, the majority of them established their colonies at Machhimpur in the suburb of the district town of Sylhet; at Parua-Chandipur regions of Sunamganj and at the Bhanubil pargana in the Kamalganj sub-division of modern Moulavi Bazar district.

However, condition improved with the coming of Gambhir Singh to the throne. Gambhir Singh had to start everything afresh. He was successful in bringing peace in the country and created a congenial

atmosphere for the return of the people who went into exile. People began to return to Manipur including the descendants of the Moirangs, Angoms, Luwangs and the like but almost all the fugitive Khamuls/ (Bishnupriyas) who had been earlier reduced to lower social status at their homeland in Manipur on account of Meiteiaization, preferred to stay wherever they newly settled. In the new lands they found themselves free from social discriminations and royal oppressions. Moreover, the fertile lands of the new place provided the easy means of livelihood. Therefore, many of them did not return to Manipur, and stayed as permanent settlers in the Barak Valley in Assam, Tripura and in the Surma Valley (now in Bangladesh).

Dispute Over Kubo Valley

(From 1826 to 1844)

The Kubo Valley is between the Heerok or Yoma range of mountains, which bounds the eastern side of the Manipur Valley, and Ningthee or Chinwin river. It extends from the foot of the hills in latitude 24° 30' north to the Manipur river in the south, which falls into the

Petty principalities in the valley

Ningthee. The valley is divided into three principalities, namely, Sumjok, Khumbat, and Kule. The northern and middle portions, known as Sumjok and Khumbat respectively, were ruled by a Raja titled the Raja of Sumjok; and southern portion was ruled by the Kule Raja. In olden times the Kubo Valley remained sometimes under Manipur and sometimes under Burma. It was in possession of Burma on the outbreak of the First Anglo-Burmese War, and had been so for twelve years before. For about the same period preceeding these twelve years, it had been in the possession of Manipur. So both Manipur and Burma had their conflicting claims over the Valley since the olden times.

During the Burmese war, after the recovery of his kingdom Manipur, Gambhir Singh accompanied by Capt. Grant proceeded towards the Valley. At that time, there were still 300 or 400 Burmese soldiers, who, however, hurriedly retreated seeing the advance of the Manipuri soldiers. The Raja of Sumjok collected about 700 men in the Tamu stocade to resist the advance of Gambhir Singh's troops. He also failed, and the victorious army of Gambhir Singh reached the western bank of the Ningthee on Feb. 1, 1826 and found the entire valley deserted. In this way Gambhir Singh became successful in occupying the Kubo Valley and added it to his kingdom.

Annexation by
Gambhir Singh

But in the Treaty of Yandabo which was singhed by the English and the Burmese in 1826, no mention was made about the Kubo Valley.

Kubo Valley
not mentioned
in the Treaty of
Yandabo, 1826

Neither it was handed back to Burma, nor it was recognized as belonging to the territory of their ally, Gambhir Singh, the Raja of Manipur. Nothing was also mentioned about the boundary between Manipur and Burma. Simply "the Govt. of India considered it but just and proper that, all the places and territory in the ancient country of Manipur, which were in possession of Gambhir Singh at the date of the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo, should belong to that Chief. The Sumjok and Kumbat divisions of the Kubo Valley, as far east as the Ningthee or Chindwin river, were accordingly given to Manipur, and the Ningthee river formed the boundary between the two countries".

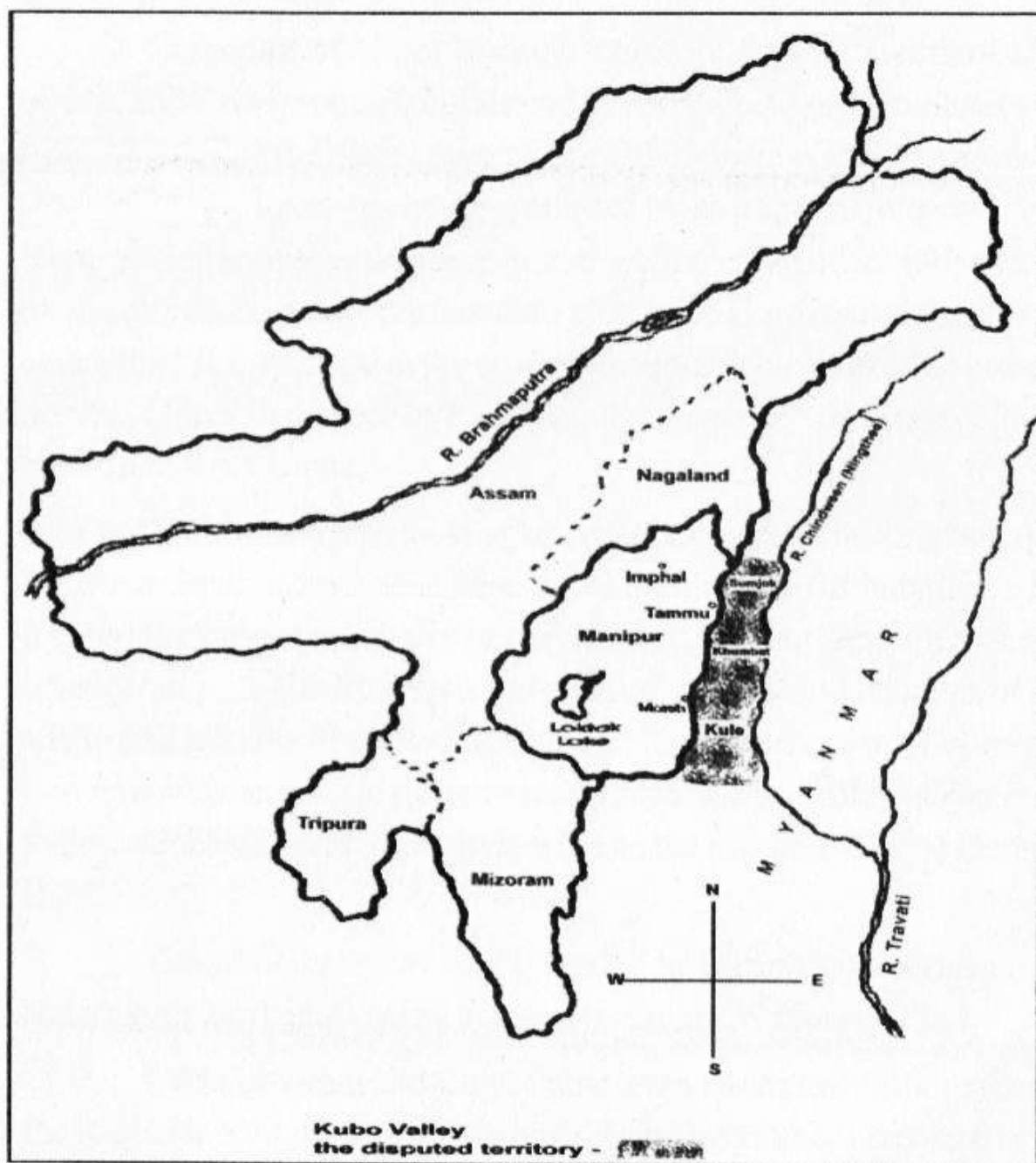
The right of Burma to the Kubo Valley became a subject of dispute since the signing of the treaty of Yandabo in February, 1826. Within a few weeks of the conclusion of the treaty, the Burmese troops crossed the river Ningthee and entered into the disputed valley but they soon retired to the Burmese territories on their own accord. Instead of renewing hostilities, Gambir Singh submitted the matter to the decision of the British Government. At first the Govt. of India stood firm on the stand that the river Ningthee was

British favour to
Gambhir Singh

the original and natural boundary between the two countries.' In the instructions to Major General, A. Campbell dated June, 1827, it was said that His Excellency in Council was decidedly of the opinion that the right of Gambir Singh should be maintained to the northern and middle portions of the Kubo Valley, bounded on the east by the Ningthee. It was also said that he would not have to observe that the acquisition of Kule, the southern portion of the valley would secure the marked and desirable boundary of the Ningthee river.

But the Burmese authority was bent upon recovering the Kubo Valley, and put forward certain records and proofs in support of their claim which, however, were not very authentic or historical. But major Burmese attempt to recover the valley Burney, resident at Ava favoured the Burmese claim and submitted a confidential report. In his letter containing the report dated July 5, 1832, he pointed out that the disputed valley had been in possession of the Burmese Kings since 1370 A.D., and that for twelve years prior to the outbreak of the late war, the Burmese had enjoyed uninterrupted possession.

But as historian J. Roy opines, there are reasons to doubt the authenticity of major Burney's report. 'It is found in the history of Assam written by Gait that in 1475 the king of Manipur along with the King of Pong invaded Khumbat and established his authority over the Kubo Valley. According to Major-General Sir James Johnstone (who was a Political Agent in Manipur for a long time), sometimes the rulers of Justification of Manipur's claim Manipur held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin river in subjection, at other times only the Kubo Valley, a strip of territory, inhabited not by the Burmese, but by Shans, and lying between Manipur proper and Chindwin. Again they were driven back into Manipur proper. For the greater part of the century (18th Century) the Kubo Valley unquestionably belonged to Manipur and it was never in any sense a Burmese province, being when not under Manipur, a feudatory of the great Shan kingdom of Pong. In view





of the chequered history of Burma it is difficult to believe that the valley had been in possession of the Burmese kings since 1370 A.D. as stated by Major Burney. The Puranas of Manipur also refer to the Valley as a part of the kingdom of Manipur’.

The report of Major Burney, therefore, was unhistorical and biased, and it was probably influenced by his desire to gain popularity in the Burmese court. The British Indian Government also, perhaps being prompted by its imperial interest, took Burney’s report into active consideration, and changed its early stand on the question. It now preferred to please the Burmese authority by conceding their demand at the cost of Manipur. It gave the final orders on the subject in a letter to Resident at Ava on 16th of March 1833, which was written thus:

Burmese pressure
for Kubo Valley

“⁷On your return to Ava you will announce to the king that the Supreme Government still adheres to the opinion that the Ningthee still formed the proper boundary between Ava and Manipur, but that, in consideration of His Majesty’s feelings and wishes, and in the spirit of amity and good-will subsisting between the countries, the Supreme Government consents to the restoration of the Kubo Valley to Ava and to the establishment of the boundary line at the foot of the Yama Doung Hills”.

The transfer of the Kubo Valley to Burma was carried out accordingly by the following agreement dated 25th January, 1834.

“⁸Major Grant and Capt. Pamberton under instructions from the Right Honourable, the Governor-General in Council having made over the Kubo Valley to the Burmese Commissioners deputed from Ava are authorised to state-

First, - that it is the intention of the Supreme Government to grant a monthly stipend of five hundred Sicca rupees to the Raja of Manipur, to commence from the ninth day of January one thousand

eight hundred and thirty four, the date at which the transfer of Kubo took place as shown in the agreement mutually signed by the British and the Burmese Commissioners.

Second, it is to be distinctly understood that should any circumstances hereafter arise by which the portion of territory lately made over to Ava again reverts to Manipur, the allowance now granted by the British Government will cease from the date of such reversion."

Thus was Manipur deprived of a part of her territory. Gambhir Singh, the Raja of Manipur, was shocked at heart, but he had to accept the decision under the pressure of the mighty British Government. "It is heard that when the decision of the Government of India was communicated to ailing Gambhir Singh at his palace, he became extremely mortified and on that very day breathed his last.'

Reference:

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| 1. Edward Gait ——— | A History of Assam. P. 228. |
| 2. Dr. H.K. Borpujari- | Assam in the Days of the Company P.16.0 |
| 3. Kulbah | a local measurement of land which is equivalent to a 'Hal' or 4.82 acres. |
| 4. K. Sabita Devi ——— | 'Numismatic; A source of Manipuri History' ed. in 'Sources of the History of Manipur' By S.N.Pandey, p.62. |
| 5. A Mackenzie ——— | 'The Northeast Frontier of India' P.176. |
| 6. J. Roy ——— | History of Manipur.P.88. |
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Chapter-VIII
(The period from 1834 AD to 1891 AD)

The Britishers, being overconscious of their superiority in arms, and taking advantage of repeated rivalries of the Manipuri princess for the throne, began active interference in the internal affairs of the kingdom. They claimed, with presumptuous pride, the role of king-makers; and this arrogant attitude led them to resort to, in most cases, high-handed activities. Such activities went against the patriotic feelings of the freedom-loving Manipuris. The result was the gradual development of ill-feeling between them which culminated in the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891.

On the death of Gambhir Singh in 1834, his son, Chandra Kirti Singh, a boy of only two years at that time, was placed on the throne by Senapati Nar Singh, a great grandson of Gopal Singh alias Pamheiba. He sincerely took the responsibility of protecting the young prince from all dangers. Frequent attempts were made by different aspirants to obtain possession of the throne but all were frustrated. But Maharani Kumudini Devi, mother of Chandra Kirti Singh, always had an apprehension lest the Regent Nar Singh should finally usurp the throne. There was, of course, no cause for such apprehension, Maharani and her son were looked after by Nar Singh with due honour; still she could not believe him. The instigations of the enemies of Nar Singh increased her suspicion so much that in 1844 she made an attempt to manage his murder. In the action Nar Singh was severely wounded, but could not be killed. Many of the participators of the crime were apprehended; and the Maharani, fearful of the consequences, fled from the country to Cachar with the young 'Raja'. The throne thus fell vacant, and the country was likely to plunge into chaos and anarchy. To prevent this eventuality, the Regent Nar Singh assumed the 'Raj' in 1844 and the British Government formally recognized him as the new Maharaja of Manipur.

Trouble of
succession

Maharaja Nar Singh (1844 -1859)

Nar Singh a great grandson of Gopal Singh alias Pamheiba, thus became the sovereign of Manipur through political exigencies. By nature he was very cool and extremely religious. It is said that it was during his reign that many Brahmin scholars came to Manipur among whom special mention may be made of one Acharya Brahmin who came from Kharadaha in Assam. In Manipur he came to be known as 'Warilibam' meaning story-teller. He was also a patron of 'Kirtan'. During his reign under his patronage cultural performances 'Nipa-Pala' (a performance by a group of male artists) and 'Rajeswari-Pala' (a performance by females), received final developments. To sum up, Nar Singh steered clear Manipur from a period of chaos and anarchy, and gave his people good governance, peace, prosperity and cultural refinements. All these achievements enabled him to enjoy the warmth of his people's heart although he did not belong to the direct royal line. He died in 1850.

Maharaj Chandrakirti Singh (1851 to 1886)

Nar Singh, as discussed earlier, had to assume the 'Raj' under the pressure of political necessities. Heartily he wished to bring back the rule of his master's line. It is said that from his death bed he gave instruction to his three sons to find out prince Chandra Kirti Singh from Cachar and to restore him to the throne. But his crooked brother, Devendra Singh did not lose a moment to capture power as soon as he died. Devendra Singh, who thus sat on the throne, had no popularity in the country. He was disliked by the people and deserted by his own army. Finding his position very insecure, after a brief reign which lasted only three months, he escaped to Cachar. Prince Chandra kirti Singh returned to Manipur, and he was welcomed by the people with great joy. The jubilant people hailed him as their 'Maharaja'.

His accession to throne

Chandra Kirti Singh was very sensible and obliging, and was of mild disposition. When the British Political Agent made delays in according formal recognition to him as the head of the Manipur state, he

His character became very much aggrieved. In retaliation, he helped the Naga tribes of the North-east with men and money in their hostile acts against the Britishers. However, when the aspired recognition was accorded to him, he turned a good friend of the English and helped them afterwards in many ways. He was very conscious of his rights and had a strong desire to preserve the unity and integrity of his domain.

The Sepoy Mutiny broke out in 1857 and its flame was moving towards the direction of Manipur. The Chittagong mutineers, being

Relation with English defeated by the British regiments there, began to move towards the Manipur frontier. Some of his rival princes, particularly Narendrajit Singh, son of Chourajit Singh, took advantage of it and joined their ranks. Mr. McCulloch, the Political Agent of Manipur requested Chandra Kirti Singh not to allow them to enter into his territory. Remaining true to the spirit of friendship that grew between them, and to protect his own interest, he acted against the followers of this historic national upsurge. Accordingly, he sent an army which captured prince Narendrajit Singh and other princes, and killed many of the mutineers. For this service, the British Government showered lavishly honours on him and his army. Again in 1877 he helped the English in their expeditions against the Nagas and the English, in return, helped the Maharaja in repulsing the attack of the Raja of Samjok on his border outpost in the east towards the Kubo Valley.

Since the time of Gambhir Singh the policy of the Manipur Government was the permanent conquest of the Naga hills. It carried occasional raids to the interior of the Naga hills. This frightened the Nagas so much so that many of the Naga villages to the North of Manipur offered voluntary submissions by paying tributes regularly. Thus

Manipur's system of control consisted in raids as savage as those of the Nagas themselves. Any way, Manipur exercised supremacy over a considerable Naga territory for years and appeared as the 'de-facto' master of the hills. But there was no clear-cut boundary line to show the exact Naga territories under Manipur's occupation. As a result, there occurred constant conflicts between the Manipuris and the Angamis, who were there in the northern boundary, over disputed territories.

As regards the attitude of the English towards the Naga policy of Manipur, they had their own considerations. They also wanted to suppress the turbulent Naga tribes, but at heart they did not like Manipur to extend her sway over the land of the Nagas; because, they too feared, control over Nagaland would provide Manipur an access to the Upper Assam Valley which then formed a part of their empire. Keeping in mind this factor, a vague boundary line was drawn in 1842 between the Naga territory and Manipur by Lt. Biggs representing the British side and Capt. Gordon the Manipur Government. It fixed the Jiri river in the west, Dootigur range in the North-east and the river Mao in the south as the boundaries between the two. But this Biggs Gordon Line was accepted seriously neither by the Nagas nor by the Manipuris. As a result, tensions again occurred between the two, and the conflict between the Manipuris and the Angami Nagas was on the increase. Any way, to solve the Angami Naga-Manipur issue, a new boundary line was drawn in 1872. The 'Line' of 1842 was maintained in all essential points so far as it was clearly identified. Only a few villages on the dividing ridge of the water-pent over which Manipur had acquired supremacy were demarcated as belonged to that state.

In 1877 when the Nagas rose in revolt and threatened the English headquarter at Samagutimg, Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh helped the English and chastised the Nagas. Again in 1878 when the Angami

British Policy and demarcation of border
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Nagas threatened the English at Kohima where the headquarter was shifted, Chandra Kirti Singh, on the request of the Political Agent Johnstone sent 2000 soldiers under the commands of his eldest son Surachandra, third son Tikendrajit and Thangal General. The Nagas were terrified to submission and thus normalcy was restored.

His help to
suppress the
Nagas

The friendly understanding between Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh and the English reached the climax in 1880. By the beginning of that year, a party of Merma tribe made a daring raid on the Baladhan Tea garden in Cachar and killed the Garden Manager, Mr. Blyth and sixteen Coolies. ²On the request of Mr. Johnstone, Chandra Kirti Singh sent 200 Manipur soldiers to the aid of the English. In recognition of this friendly feeling and help, on 20th Feb. 1880 the British Government conferred upon him, the 'star and the badge' of K.C.S.I., and on September of the same year, Her Majesty, Queen Victoria presented her warrant appointing him as Knight Commander of the Star of India.

Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh died in 1886 at the age of 54 after a continuous reign of thirty-five years. His achievements earned for him an honourable place in the history of Manipur. He established peace in the kingdom by removing all dangers- internal and external. He devoted himself for doing welfare to his subjects. ³For the convenience of communications, he built a number of roads, and established numerous Post Offices, Telegraph Offices and Hospitals in different parts of his kingdom for the welfare of his subjects. He was also extremely religious. As a token of his regards for Lord Gauranga, he sent a ⁴"Brass gong" weighing 2 (Two) mounds to be presented to the 'Sri Mandir' the ancestral house of Lord Gouranga. Maharaj Chandra Kirti Singh was thus in all respects one of the greatest rulers of Manipur "But", as historian Jyotirmoy Roy says, "his commitments to the British Government and too much dependence on them do not seem to be befitting of an

independant ruler. He relied much on the British Political Agent Johnstone; he accepted titles from the British Government. All these activities show that he practically failed to maintain his independent status”.

The Darkest Period of history and the Anglo-Manipur War, 1891

The death of Chandra Kirti Singh was followed by the darkest period in the history of Manipur. Maharaj Chandra Kirti Singh left behind ten sons - namely Bhairabjit alias Pakka Sna, Kesharjit, Padmalochan alias Gopal Sna, Kulachandra, Gandhar Singh, Tikendrajit alias Koireng, Jhalakriti, Angou Sna and Zillanganba. More children means more problem of sucession. Over and above the acute problem of succession, there was the growing tendency of the British Government to interfere in the internal affairs of the state. So long as the Burmese authority was there in the east strong and united, the British Government, out of its fear, maintained Manipur as a protected ally. They never entered into the internal fueds among the princes for the throne. They simply extended recognition to the prince who could capture the throne. But the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1886) brought a change in the British policy towards Manipur. Burma was completely destroyed in this war, and the English now felt free to complete their imperial hunger by bringing Manipur, the only remaining independant native state of India under their control. Hence the period after the death of Chandra Kirti Singh was marked by internal feuds among the Princes for the throne in one hand and the active British interference, on the other.

Before his death, Maharaj Chandra Kirti Singh, in order to ensure peace in the kingdom, ⁵distributed the offices in the following order: the first son of the first Queen, Surachandra Singh would be his successor, the first son of the second Queen, Kulachandra Singh the ‘Yubaraj’ (heir-apparent), and the first son of the third Queen, Tikendrajit Singh the Senapati. The remaining sons were also entrusted with many other important charges in the kingdom.

Maharaj Surachandra Singh
(1886 – 1890)

As per the arrangement made by his father, Sura-Chandra Singh ascended the throne in 1886. He was the most unfortunate monarch of Manipur. His whole reign was marked by troubles, and at last he was removed from the throne in an inglorious way in 1890. From the very beginning of his reign he had to encounter secret conspiracies of his brothers, and rebellions of other pretenders to the throne. Under these conditions he sought the help of the British Government but it now showed little interest to his requests. As a result, the relation between the Maharaja and the British Political Agent in Manipur began to deteriorate.

The younger brother of Maharaj Surachandra, Tikendrajit possessed, over and above his appealing physical appearance, many rare qualities combined in him. He was a good sportsman, an expert marksman and a man of enormous strength. The people of Manipur of all castes, creeds and ages used to love him from the core of their hearts. When he was appointed as the 'Senapati' (Commander of forces) there was much jubilation among the people and all were in praise for him. He was very frank and jovial; and he developed intimate relation with the Political Agent of Manipur, Mr. Grimwood. This extreme popularity of Tikendrajit was not viewed with pleasure by his half-brother, Pakka Sna. Rather, he became jealous of him and began to organize conspiracies against him. This prepared the ground for the growth of rivalry, enmity and conflicts among the Princes which ultimately proved fatal to the fate of Manipur.

Division of his
children into rival
groups

The enmity between Tikendrajit and Pakka Sna went on increasing. 'Many believe that rivalry for the hands of one Manipuri damsel of exceptional beauty named 'Maipakpi' also added fuel to their enmity. When Maharaj Surachandra favoured the cause of the latter, the former nourished a grudge against him. Another young prince, Zilla

Nganba was also once insulted by the Maharaja. Under these circumstances the surviving eight brother-princes became divided into two rival groups- in one group there were Maharaja Surachandra, Pakka Sna, Kesharjit and Gopal Sna, and in the other group were Yubaraj Kulachandra, Senapati Tikendrajit, Angou Sna and Zilla Nganba. The rivalry and hostile activities of the members of the two

Mid-night attack
on Surachandra

groups created a chaotic political situation in the kingdom. ⁸On the mid-night of 21st September, 1890 Zilla Nganba, under the patronage of Tikendrajit, stealthily entered into the Maharaja's apartment accompanied by some followers and began shooting aiming at the bed-room. The Maharaja, a man of little courage, instead of organising resistance, escaped through the window and took shelter in the British Residency there. He was so much afraid that he expressed his desire to the Political Agent, Mr. Grimwood that he wanted to leave Manipur for the time being and to go on a pilgrimage to Brindavan.

It may be mentioned here that in no letter or statement Surachandra made a formal abdication but Mr. Grimwood as he had no good terms with him, interpreted the prayer for pilgrimage by Surachandra

Surachandra
deprived
of the throne

as his abdication, and communicated the same to Yubaraj Kulachandra and Senapati Tikendrajit. Thereupon Kulachandra Singh procclaimed himself as the 'Maharaja' and sent the following communication to the Governor-General of India:

"I have most respectfully to inform Your Excellency that owing to certain reason, there was constant displeasure and quarrels between our brothers, for which my eldest brother, Maharaja Surachandra Singh, making voluntary abdication of the throne to me (the heir of the throne) left for Brindavan. Accordingly I ascended the throne of my father and grandfather on the 8th Ashin last" Poor Surachandra was hurriedly packed off for Brindavan and Mr. Grimwood intimated the British Government to recognise Kulachandra Singh as the 'Maharaj' and Tikendrajit Singh as the 'Yubaraj'. Thus after a short period, the reign of Maharaj Surachandra came to an inglorious end.

Anglo-Manipur War of 1891

Yubaraj Kulachandra Singh now became 'Maharaja' and Senapati Tikendrajit Singh the new 'Yubaraj'. Tikendrajit Singh was the ablest among all his brothers. His personality overshadowed all others, and virtually he emerged all in all in the state. He was not only a brave warrior but also a patriot of the highest order. He aimed at making Manipur an ideal state. With this aim in view, he carried on drastic changes

Rule of Kulachandra
and activities of
Tikendrajit

in the administration. There is no denying the fact that under this new administration, peace was returning fast in the land. People began to enjoy peace and happiness. On the other hand, unfortunate Surachandra Singh being completely ignorant of English language, could not know that he was tricked by Mr. Grimwood. He did not abdicate the throne, but in the 'pass' issued to him it was indicated that he abdicated. When he came to know about it on his way to pilgrimage at Cachar, he immediately made repeated appeals, first to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, and then to the British Government of India, for his restoration. But the British Government had its own imperial ambition over Manipur. As mentioned earlier, so long as Burma remained strong, it kept Manipur as an independent ally. But after the destruction of Burma in the third Anglo-Burmese War, it planned to establish British political dominance over it by placing a puppet prince on the throne. Exactly, the Britishers wanted to play the role of 'King-makers' in Manipur as they had already done in Bengal after the battle of Plassey, 1757. They found such a puppet prince in the person of Kulachandra Singh. But problem was there

British plan
to dominate
Manipur

with Tikendrajit, the Prince with a strong patriotic feeling. He was a hard nut who could not be cracked so easily. Again the British Government also clearly realized that he could not be mended to their design; and therefore, they were determined to end him altogether. The prayer of Surachandra Singh for his restoration

was rejected on the ground that it might lead to greater troubles in Manipur. He was proposed to be pensioned off. Again, the Governor-General, Lord Landsdowne put all the blames of anarchy in Manipur on Tikendrajit and planned to remove him by a strategy.

The Governor-General with his plan sent the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. Quinton, accompanied by Col. Skene as Commander of a British force, towards Manipur through Golaghat. Mr. Quinton reached Imphal with his party in the morning of the 22nd March, 1891. Immediately after his arrival, he ordered for making preparations for a 'Durbar' (Conference) with the Regent and his brothers in the Residency,

Attempt
to arrest
Tikendrajit

to be held on that very day after breakfast. It had been decided to recognize Kulachandra Singh as the 'Maharaja', but his brother, Yubaraj Tikendrajit was to be arrested at the 'Durbar' and banished for several years. Some-how Tikendrajit came to know about the conspiracy against him; and so he expressed again and again his inability to attend the Durbar on the ground of ill-health. All plans to arrest Tikendrajit thus ended in failure.

Mr. Quinton, who was proud of the invincibility of the British arms, made a fatal mistake by resorting to the application of force. It was decided to launch a direct attack on the house of Tikendrajit at dawn and arrest him. Accordingly on the 24th March, 1891 at about 3.30 A.M., a British army marched out from the Residency and attacked the house of the Yubaraj. This illegal interference in the internal affairs of

British application
of force and the
beginning of the war.

Manipur and the unprovoked attack on the house of the Yubaraj seriously wounded the feelings of the natives. The guards of the palace took up arms and launched a counter attack. Unable to withstand it, Mr. Quinton and his followers fell back to the Residency. The furious army of Manipur followed them and beset the Residency. The situation became extremely dangerous for the English. Finding helpless, Mr. Quinton

decided to come to terms with the Yubaraj. Under assurance of safety Mr. Quinton, Col. Skene, Lt. Simpson, Mr. Cossins, Mr. Grimwood – these five English Officers went to Tikendrajit in the Palace to finalise the terms of peace. Tikendrajit, as a pre-condition, asked them to lay down their arms first. On their refusal to lay down arms, Tikendrajit left the palace and moved away. Holding their heads high the British Officers, perhaps being proud of the so-called might of their race, were turning back to return. The guards of the palace could not bear this humiliating attitude and jumped upon them and killed them all. Their heads were severed from their bodies and put them into a ditch. Thereupon full-scale British military operation followed from all directions, and thus began the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891.

Causes and Consequences of the Anglo-Manipur War:

Among the native states of eastern India, Manipur was of great strategic importance. It was an important factor in the British plan of defence against further aggression from the Burmese side. Therefore, since the treaty of Yandabo, 1826, the British maintained friendly and cordial relation with Manipur maintaining their Political Agents from time to time. But as years passed by, certain factors occurred which were gradually disturbing the cordial relation. Difference of opinion on certain issues bred mutual distrust, and the growing distrust ultimately flared up into an open show down in 1891.

Causes of the War

Like the Mughals of India, the Manipur royal families had no definite law of succession. As a result, the death of almost every monarch was followed by a contest among the members of the royal family for capturing the throne. Every member of the royal family sought the support of the British Government for capturing the throne which ultimately paved the way for their interference into the internal affairs of Manipur.

Absence of law of succession

The British were imperialist out and out. Although they announced that they entered into the region not for any 'thirst' for territory, but for

Imperial ambition of the British

their own security, and for the protection of the people of the region, their inner intention was to avail of every opportunity to extend their political domination. Hence, in the affairs of Manipur, they interfered again and again. The Manipuris are freedom-loving people. They were ever-willing to maintain friendly relations, but in no way ready to surrender any part of their sovereignty. The repeated interferences of the British in the internal affairs of Manipur was not viewed with pleasure by the Manipuris.

The immediate factor which led to the Manipuri rebellion or Manipur War of 1891, was the tactless interference of the British in the

Immediate cause or factor

dispute of succession which followed after the death of Raja Chandra Kirti Singha. The 'Raja' before his death, to avoid future complicacies, distributed the 'Offices' of the state among his eight sons. First son of the first wife, Sura Chandra was made his successor, of the second wife, Kulachandra the 'Yubaraj' (heir apparent), and of the third wife, Tikendrajit the Senapati. According to this arrangement, after the death of Chandra Kirti Singh, Sura Chandra ascended the throne in 1880.

On this arrangement of Offices, the sons of Chandra Kirti were divided in their opinions. The eight brothers were divided into two

Conflicting claim of the Princes and decision of British Govt.
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factions. Sura Chandra was supported by the three brothers, and Yuabaraj Kula Chandra by the other three brothers including Tikendrajit. Tikendrajit was the ablest of all the brothers, and so, under his backing the second faction, i.e. the Kula Chandra faction was gaining ground. An attempt was made to murder Sura Chandra, who after the incident, took shelter under the British. He requested the British to help him in regaining his throne. By the mean time Kula Chandra Singha ascended the throne

and he also requested the British to recognize him as the 'Raja' of Manipur. At that time the British Political Agent of Manipur was Mr. Grimwood, an inexperienced and tactless person. He had no good terms with Surachandra; and moreover, he wanted to create a complicated situation to pave the way for British domination. Hence he did not try for an amicable settlement of the problem. Rather, he persuaded the British Govt. to recognise Kula Chandra Singha as the 'Raja', and proposed to send Sura Chandra Singha away on a pension. It was also decided to punish the persons, particularly Tikendrajit, who planned for the overthrow of Surachandra because conspirators in any way should not be relied upon.

To implement the above decision, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. Quinton with 400 Gurkha soldiers, and accompanied by three other British officials came to Imphal on 22nd March, 1891. He

It's implementation
and war.

ordered for the arrangement of a 'Durbar' (Conference) with Kula Chandra and his supporting brothers in the Residency for the purpose of conferring British recognition to Kulachandra as the 'Raja' of Manipur. A secret plan was also made to arrest Tikendrajit in the Durbar Hall. Any way, Kula Chandra and his brothers came on the appointed day. But being proud of the British military might, Quinton showed utter discourtesy to them. The party was kept waiting for an indefinite period at the gate of the Residency House. It was too much humiliation for the freedom-loving princes. They also came to know about the plan of the arrest of Tikendrajit. Hence, they avoided the 'Durbar', and the British plan to arrest Tikendrajit was

Murder of Chief
Commissioner of
Assam & his party

foiled. Thereupon, the British resorted to high-handed actions, and besieged the palace of the Yubaraj. The guards of the palace opened fire, and the skirmish started. It was the beginning of the famous Manipur Rebellion or the Manipur War of 1891. In a frenzy, Mr. Quinton and his four Officers were taken to the courtyard of the palace and executed.

Hearing the incident, the British forces from all directions – from Kohima, Silchar and Tamo (Burma) marched towards Manipur. It was, as if a war between an ant and an elephant. In front of the numerous

Attack by British
forces & the battle
of Khongjom.

well-equipped and well-trained British army, the exemplary heroism of Tikendrajit and Thangal General, and the fight unto death by Paona Brajabashi at Khongjom could not avoid the inevitable. Kula Chandra Singha and Thangal General were arrested and two days later Tikendrajit surrendered. Thus ended the Anglo-Manipur War in a disaster. Holding an arbitrary trial, and observing little formalities of justice, the Britishers held Kulachandrajit Singh, Angou Sna, Tikendrajit and Thangal General guilty on the charges of waging war against the Empress of India, murder and abetment to the murder of the British Officers. Kulachandra Singh and Angou Sna were transported for life, but Tikendrajit and Thangal General were hanged to death on the 13th of August 1891. Among all the victims of the British imperial action, Tikendrajit Singh was the most enlightened, dedicated and patriotic. He was in fact the finest flower of the spirit of freedom of Manipur. His supreme sacrifice for the cause of the motherland has earned for him a permanent place in the hearts of the people of Manipur. The people of Manipur of all castes and creeds pay homage to this great son of the soil by observing the day of his hanging, 13th of August, every year as the "Patriot's Day".

Consequences of the War

The disaster of Manipur in the War of 1891 gave the finishing touch to the establishment of British supremacy in the North-east region of India. (1) The only State which so long defied the British supremacy was humbled. (2) Tikendrajit and Thangal General were openly

Results

hanged; Kulachandra and the other associate brothers were transported to the Island of Andaman. (3) Chura Chand Singh, the great grandson of Raja Nar Singh was made the King of Manipur. The 'Sanad'

given to Chura Chand Singh provided for the complete subordination of the Manipur state, and for the payment of a yearly tribute, which was fixed at Rs. 50,000/- payable from August, 1891. (4) The administration of the state during the minority of the 'Raja' was entrusted to a Superintendant and a Political Agent. Thus, the sun of the freedom of Manipur at last set, and the country, like other States of the region, was reduced to the status of a 'tributary state'.

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Chapter : - IX
ANGLO-MANIPUR RELATIONS
(FROM 1826 TO 1891)

The English came to India during the 17th century A.D., and in course of time conquered it and turned it into their empire. Their imperial ambition prompted them to extend their authority towards the North-East frontier also where different ethnic tribes and communities live. Naturally they had to come in contact with them and develop relations. The Jayantias were the first hill people of the North-East frontier to come into direct contact with the British. Cachar came into contact with the Bengal Government during the closing years of the 18th century A.D.

A. During the Burmese War: (1824 A.D. – 1826 A.D.)

As regards Manipur, she had occasional communications with the British Government in early times, but active relation between the two started from the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). Manipur had been devastated by the Burmese, and its ruling family had fled to Cachar. In 1823 British Government opened communications with Gambhir Singh, one of the members of the Manipur royal family living in Cachar as a fugitive. In the mean time the Burmese army carried their acts of plunder and atrocities into the British territories which compelled the British Government to declare war against them in 1824. Thus, the Burmese appeared as the common danger to both the parties, and so they felt the necessity of co-operation and concerted action. David Scott was already carrying on negotiations with Gambhir Singh. After an agreement with the British regarding the future political set up of Manipur, Gambhir Singh and his associate Nar Singh with their men went to Badarpur camp to receive military training. 500 Manipuris under his command were taken into the pay of the British Government, and co-operated with the British troops in driving the Burmese out of Cachar. In 1825 this force was increased to 2000 men

Beginning of co-operation

and placed under the command of Capt. Grant. It was denominated the 'Manipur Levy' and was paid, accounted, and supplied with ammunitions by the British Government. Subsequently, by the Treaty of Yandaboo of 1826 Gambhir Singh was recognized as the 'Raja' of Manipur.

**B. During the reigns of Gambhir Singh and Nar Singh:
(1826 – 1850)**

Thus the relation between Manipur and the British Government began to develop on the basis of equality of status; but the latter being more powerful, very often had its will prevailed upon the former on common matters. This is evident from the two treaties signed between them – one in 1833 and the other in 1834. Gambhir Singh, the Raja of Manipur, after the death (rather Murder) of the Kachari King Govinda Chandra, wanted to take over Kachari territory on lease. But the British Government did not agree to this proposal. It concluded a treaty in 1833 by which some territorial concessions were given to Gambhir Singh in return for his military service in time of need and certain trade concessions. By the treaty of 1833 the British Government agreed to give the 'Raja' of Manipur the line of the Jiri river and the western bend of Barak as a boundary. Again, during military operations in course of the Anglo-Burmese War (1824 – 1826 A.D) Gambhir Singh occupied the Kubo Valley in the east upto the river Ningthi (Chindwin). But the Burmese monarch after the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) refused to agree to the inclusion of the Valley in Gambhir Singh's dominions claiming that it was an integral part of the Burmese Empire. The British Government settled the dispute, not much to the liking of Gambhir Singh, over the territory by the Treaty of 1834. By it ²the Kubo Valley was transferred from Manipur to Burma, and a money compensation was awarded to the Manipur Raj by the British Government in the shape of a stipend of Rs. 6000/- per annum.

As has already been said the Manipur Levy, financed by the British Government and commanded by the British Officers, was maintained in Manipur. The necessity of this Levy from the British side ended after the annexation of Cachar and the conclusion of the Anglo-Manipur treaty of 1833. Accordingly, it was handed over to the Manipur Government in 1835. Major Grant, the Commandant of the Levy, after handing over the charge, left Manipur. However, the British Government felt the necessity of placing one Political Agent there for the preservation of the friendly feeling, and for acting as medium of communication with the Manipur Government. Capt. Gordon, who had considerable experience and knowledge of the affairs of Manipur, was appointed as Political Agent and Capt. Pamberton as Joint-Commissioner there.³ It is quite evident that the duty of the Political Agent in Manipur was like that of an Ambassador. Mr. Gordon remained as Political Agent in Manipur till his death in 1844. He was succeeded by McCulloch. As long as Nar Singh lived (1834-59), the Political Agent maintained strict neutrality in

Manipur became
the Protected Ally

the internal affairs of Manipur. Thus Manipur and the British Government established relations for common interests without surrendering any part of their sovereignties. However, the latter, being more powerful, assumed the role of the protector of the former. Under these conditions, Manipur became the independent and 'Protected ally' of the British Government.

C. During the reign of Chandra Kirti Singh : (1851 A.D.-1886 A.D.)

During the beginning of the reign of Chandra Kirti Singh some misunderstanding developed with the Political Agent. This was probably because Chandra kirti Singh could not forget the indifference of the British Government to the repeated requests he had made to restore the

Misunderstanding
removed

throne of Manipur to him. Chandra Kirti Singh had gone up to the extent of helping the Naga tribes in their hostilities against the British Government with ammunitions and men.

Later on, however, all hostilities between them ceased, and friendly relation was again established. In 1851 the British Government formally recognised the accession of Chandra Kirti Singh to the throne of Manipur, and it authorised the Political Agent, Capt. McCulloch⁴ to make a public avowal of the determination of the British Government to uphold the present Rajah; and to resist and punish any party attempting thereafter to dispossess him; Chandra Kirti Singh reciprocated this friendly gesture of the British during the 'Great Uprising of 1857'. He, on the request of the Political Agent, sent a body of his troops to the frontier and prevented the mutineers from entering into Manipur.

But during the beginning of the 60's of the 19th century A.D., owing to inadequacy of resources in men and money, the Bengal Govt. proposed to withdraw the Agency from Manipur. But the reasons for which the Agency was established in 1836 still existed. An Agent was required to arbitrate disputes on the Burmese frontier, and to stop the reoccurrence of conflict among the princes for the throne. For these reasons, the Rajah, the Ministers, and the people – all wished that the Agency should be continued⁵. In a letter dated 10th February, 1864 the Raja himself asked the Govt. of India to place an Officer in Manipur.

Agency came
under the Chief
Commissioner
of Assam

He said he believed the country would sustain injury if no officers were stationed there, and asked that Capt. McCulloch might be re-appointed. At last the Govt. of India considered the appeals and decided to retain an Agent in Manipur. On the Agency being re-established, McCulloch was again appointed its Political Agent. Earlier the Agency was under the direct control of the Govt. of India. When the Assam Chief Commissionership was formed, the Agent was ordered to forward his letters through the Chief Commissioner under flying seal, and he and the Officers of Manipur have now been placed entirely under the control of the Chief Commissioner.

Since McCulloch's time, various Officers held appointments, but none had been more successful than Lt. Col. Johnstone who took charges in Sept, 1877. With his coming as the Political Agent, the relation between Manipur and the English entered into a period of extreme co-operation and good understanding. This friendly feeling reached the climax in 1880. In that year, the Mermah tribe attacked the Baladan Tea factory of the English in Cachar. On the request of Mr. Johnstone, the Maharaja sent 200 Manipuri soldiers to the aid of the English. In recognition of his help and friendship, on 20th February, 1880, the English conferred upon him the "Star and Badge of K.C.S.I.", and on September of the same year, Her Majesty, Queen Victoria presented her warrant appointing him a "Knight Commander of the Star of India".

Climax of good understanding

Col. Johnstone's popularity in Manipur was increased by a number of welfare works he had done for the people. He prevailed upon the Maharaja to abolish many kinds of severe punishments for minor crimes. He also showed lively interest for the developments of cottage industries for the welfare of the common people. The existing Residency Bungalow was found not suitable for the purpose; and so need was felt for building a new one. Fund had been sanctioned for the purpose – only a suitable site was required. The Maharaja, as a measure of his own security, provided, the site near his palace. There the new building with a large compound in front was constructed in 1880.

Manipur became a dependant ally

Johnstone retired from Office in March, 1886, and with his retirement one glorious chapter of the Anglo-Manipur relation came to an end. "Had he remained in Manipur for a longer period", as historian J. Roy has observed, "the tragic incident of 1891 might have been averted". But too much dependance on the English led to the reduction of the Political status of Manipur. The Maharaja relied much on the British Political Agent and he accepted titles from the British Government. All these show that he practically failed to maintain

his independent existence. Under these circumstances, Manipur virtually became converted into a 'dependant ally' of the British Government.

D. From dependance to Subordination ;(from 1886 to 1891).

The freedom from the Burmese fear, (as Burma was destroyed in the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1886), and the willing dependance of the royal family, encouraged the English to change their policy on Manipur. They no longer felt the necessity of keeping her independent. The British imperial hunger, which was so long kept hidden under the pressure of adverse circumstances, came over ground. The conflicts among the princes for succession to the throne, which followed after the death of Chandra Kirti Singh, was taken as an advantage by the English for fulfilling their imperial ambition. They had become determined to complete their imperial ambition by bringing Manipur, the only surviving independent native state of India, under their control. With this intention, they began to follow the policy of active interference in the internal affairs of Manipur. According to the arrangement of the late Maharaja, his eldest son, Surachandra Singh ascended the throne in 1886. But for reasons, political and personal, some of his younger brothers-particularly Kula Chandra Singh and Tikendrajit, did not view it with pleasure. As a result, conflicts followed among the brothers for occupying the throne. The then British Political Agent, Mr. Grimwood actively interfered in it and persuaded the British Government to recognise Kulachandra Singh, who was expected to become their puppet, as the 'Raja' of Manipur. The British Government, however, anticipated opposition to their design

Anglo-Manipur War, 1891

from prince Tikendrajit, the most patriotic of all the brothers and beloved of all the people of Manipur . Hence the British Government arranged a plan to recognise Kula Chandra Singh as the 'Raja' of Manipur, and at the same time to arrest Tikendrajit. The plan failed; but this high-handed activity of the British Government, and the wanton aggression on the palace of Tikendrajit

led to the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. The story of the War is almost too well-known to require repetition. The rebellion was suppressed, and its leaders Tikendrajit and Thangal General were openly hanged, and Kulachandra Singh and other princes were transported to the

Manipur was
reduced to a
tributary State.

Andaman islands. Churachand Singh, the great grandson of the previous Raja Nar Singh was made the 'Raja' of Manipur. The Sanad given to Churachand Singh provided for the complete subordination of Manipur state to the British Government, and for the payment of a yearly tribute of Rs. 50,000/-. Manipur thus was reduced to the status of a 'tributary state'.

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Chapter : - X
Period of Transition
From British Superintendancy to Merger with
Indian Union(1891 AD to 1949 AD)

The Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 ushered in a period of political changes in Manipur. It brought to an end the existence of Manipur as an independent sovereign state. Just as the Battle of Plassey (1757 AD) had destroyed the independent existence of Bengal and reduced it into a dependency of the British with a puppet 'Nawab' on its throne so also the Anglo-Manipur War destroyed the sovereignty of Manipur and reduced her to the status of a tributary state by placing a 'Raja' in the person of Churachand Singh, the great grandson of Raja Nar Singh, on the throne. This period covers the reigns of Maharaj Churachand Singh (1891 A.D. to 1941 A.D.) and a part of the reign of Maharaj Budha Chandra Singh (1941 A.D. to 1955 A.D.). The Meitei monarchy, which ruled over Manipur with full glory and greatness particularly from the days of Pamheiba alias Garib Newaz, started showing decadence on account of two factors- its leaning towards reactionery rule under the influence of British Superintendancy and the gradual infiltration of the currents of Indian national and political movements. As a result, some movements, both anti-monarchical and anti-British, started and gradually gaining ground in the land. In this regard mention may be made of the socio-political movement launched by a great revolutionary, Hizam Irabat Singh, and of the anti-British and ethnic movements led by the Kukis and the Kabui Nagas. All these movements, as will be seen in the subsequent discussions, turned the political water of Manipur murky, and it was in this murky political condition, the Indian national leaders entered into the scene, prevailed upon Maharaj Budha-Chandra Singh and persuaded him to sign the Instrument of Accession on 21st September, 1949 which effected the merger of Manipur into the Indian Union.

Features of
the period

Maharaj Churachand Singh (1891AD to 1941 AD)

After the humiliating defeat in the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the state had become forfeit, and the English could have annexed Manipur to the British Indian territories. But cautious considerations from different angles led the English to leave Manipur, like many other Indian native states, as a tributary state under a native ruler. Accordingly, Mr. H.M. Durand, Secretary to the Govt. of India, by the notification No. 1862-A dated 18th September 1891 announced Churachand Singh, son of Choubiyaima and the great grandson of Raja Nar Singh, to be the Raja of Manipur. In the 'sanad' given to him, it was provided: -

- 1) that the chieftaincy of the state would be hereditary,
- 2) that the subsequent succession to the throne would be subject to the approval of the Govt. of India,
- 3) and that state would pay an annual tribute which was fixed in 1892 at Rs 50,000/- payable from the 1st of August 1891. For the treacherous attack and murder of the British officers a fine of Rs. 2,50,000/- was imposed in 1892 and this sum was to be paid in five yearly instalments.

The investiture of Raja Churachand Singh, who was at that time only a boy of six years was carried out on the 29th September, 1892. During his minority, as per another provision of the sanad, the administration of the state was entrusted to the Political Agent who was to work as Superintendant. He was given full power to introduce any reform that he considered beneficial, but he was instructed to pay due regard to the customs and traditions of the Manipuris and to interfere as

Administration during his minority

little as possible with the existing institutions. Thus began a period of British Superintendency during which numerous reforms were carried out. The revenue administration

was carefully revised, the old system of forced labour, known as ²'Lallup', was abolished and better judicial tribunals were introduced. The boundaries of the state were defined, steps were taken to disarm the hill tribes, and a cart- road was opened from the capital Imphal to Kohima. ³"Sometimes after 1898, the need for a rural Police Force was felt and Choukidari system was evolved. One Choukidar was appointed for about 100 houses. These Choukidars received Rs2/- per month, and half a ⁴'pari' of rent-free land and 12 pots of paddy from the villagers".

On attainment of maturity Raja Churachand Singh was married to Dhana Manjuri Devi. His coronation ceremony was performed in 1908 with due pomp and grandeur, and it was attended by Sir Lancelot

His coronation
and the new
Administrative
arrangement.

Hare, the Lt. Governor of Assam. Churachand Singh now became the head of the state; but his headship was almost titular. The administration of the state was now vested to a Durbar which was consisted of six Manipuri members under the presidentship of an English I.C.S officer. It was to administer all matters of revenue and finance of the state. The Durbar was the highest court in the state, but all sentences passed by it exceeding five years rigorous imprisonment require the confirmation of the 'Raja', and sentences of death that of the Governor of Assam. Under this system of administration the English, as in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey of 1757, became the 'de-facto' rulers of Manipur.

Raja Churachand Singh thereafter carried in him a sense of obligation to the English, and the English utilised it for the fulfilment of their colonial and political designs. Thus, he helped the English in extending

His services
to the British
Government

their influence in the tribal areas of the north-eastern region. The troops of Manipur helped the English in controlling the Abor and Mishmi disturbances, and in containing the troubles created by the Hailakandi tea garden labourers and the strike of the employees of the Assam Bengal Railway. Again, during the First

World War (1914 A.D. to 1919 A.D.) Raja Churachand Singh helped the British Government with all possible resources of men, money and materials. The most remarkable of the help which he rendered was the provision of a Labour Corps of two thousand people raised from Manipur. The 'Labour Corps' was sent to the European theatre of the great war. ⁵At the end of the war, the British Government, in recognition of these invaluable services, reduced the tribute payable by Manipur by five thousand rupees annually for 10 years, and conferred upon its Raja, Churachand Singh the titles of 'C.B.E' and 'Maharaja'.

Rebellion of tribes:

Two tribal rebellions of serious nature occurred during his reign—the one engineered by the Kukis and the other by the Kabui Nagas. The former was mainly anti-English while the latter was partly anti-English and partly ethnic. None was, however, anti-Manipuri; still, Maharaj Churachand Singh was to extend, on political obligations, passive support to the English for their suppression.

The affairs of the Kukis and the Nagas were dealt by the English on behalf of the Maharaj. Here also they followed their convenient imperial policy of 'Divide and Rule'. They fanned the ethnic antagonism of the tribes, and placed the one against the other whenever possible. This enabled them to keep both the tribes under control. However, during the later part of the First World War, the Kukis created a problem for

Kuki rebellion

the English. The Kukis vehemently opposed the English endeavour to collect able-bodied Kukis for the 'Labour Corps' to be sent to the European theatre of the war. The Kukis were unwilling to leave their country and to go to unknown places. When the government used force to compel them, they also took up arms to resist

Circumstances
leading to rebellion

the attempt. In December 1917 A.D., the Kukis of Mombi and Longya villages started hostility by leading a series of raids into the southern tip of the Manipur Valley. Their

operations were against both the English and the other tribes (some Naga tribes) who did not oppose the English effort of raising of 'Labour Corps'. This Kuki rebellion assumed a serious turn when many other tribes also started troubles in a similar manner. The anxiety of the English was further increased by a rumour that the Indian Nationalists from Sylhet and Cachar were also encouraging the Kukis in their rebellion. The British Government now faced with a general uprising of the tribes of the entire hilly region surrounding the Manipur Valley.

To deal with this serious situation, the British Government at last launched an all-out offensive against the revolting hill tribes. 'Nearly New administrative arrangements three thousand well-equipped soldiers were engaged under Brigadier General Macquoid. This time the Kukis with their primitive weapons could not resist. Their oppositions began to collapse, and by the spring of 1919 A.D., they began to surrender from all sides. After the complete suppression of this revolt, ⁷"a new scheme for the administration of the hills was then adopted, and three sub-divisions were opened, each administered by a European or Anglo-Indian officer lent to the state by the Government of Assam".

During the Kuki rebellion, the Kabuis (also known as Rongmeis) all along remained peaceful and loyal to the British Government. This loyalty to the British led the Kukis to attack and torture them. The Kabuis suffered very badly at the hands of the Kukis, but the British Government did not do anything to protect them. This inaction of the Government removed their loyalty, and so they began to defy the British authority. Subsequently, they refused to pay house taxes, but in order to exert the (b) Kabui Rebellion British power, the Assistant Political Agent of Manipur, Mr. P.L.Crawford by show of force compelled them to pay the same. This high-handed action of the English together with the suspicion that they were out to impose Christianity on them, gave birth to an unrest among the Nagas. Under such conditions,

during the 20's of the 20th century, a Kabui (Rongmei) Naga, Jadonang started a movement to defy the Government and also to protect the traditional faith and culture. He became extremely popular, and the Kabuis began to look upon him as "a chosen leader who would overthrow the

Causes of the
rebellion and
leadership of
Jadonang

existing administration, destroy the Kukis and eventually set up a Kabui Raj". Under the inspiration of Jadonang the Kabui people also resorted to acts of defiance of the Government. Confrontation with the Government followed, and it culminated in the incident of the killing of four Manipuri traders in a Naga village, ⁸"The activities of Jadonang rose to such a pitch that the Commissioner of Naga Hills and the Political Agent of Manipur could no longer ignore him. In the year 1930 A.D. after gathering necessary information regarding the whereabouts of Jadonang, the Political Agent decided to make a demonstration of force. Jadonang had already left Manipur, and entered Cachar where he was arrested by the Cachar authorities'. At Imphal Jadonang was tried on several charges and was sentenced to death. Accordingly, Jadonang was hanged in August, 1931 A.D.

However, the movement of the Kabui Nagas did not die with the death of Jadonang. Rather, it was continued with more vigour by his

Leadership
of Rani
Gaidinliu

teenaged cousin, Gaidinliu. By this time, the Indian National Movement took a strong turn. Mahatma Gandhi started his historic 'Civil Disobedience Movement'. ⁹The Kabuis under the leadership of Gaidinliu might have been encouraged by it. Her heroic stand and able guidance made her almost a legendary figure, and the Nagas came to regard her as their 'Rani'. The activities of the movement, and the popularity of Gaidinliu alarmed the British Government. Several means were adopted to find her whereabouts and to arrest her, but all went in vain. At last, after much difficulty, the Government could arrest her. She was also tried and sentenced to imprisonment for life. The Indian National leaders, particularly Pandit Nehru, tried in vain to obtain

her release, and ¹⁰“this heroine girl”, as Pandit Nehru said, “had to waste her bright young womanhood in dark cells and solitude”.

After the elimination of Jadonang, and the confinement of Rani Gaidinliu, the Government expected that the Kabui movement had ended. But the subsequent movement belied the expectation of the Government, it rather drew other Naga tribes to its cause. ¹¹“The Zemeis, Liangmeis, and the Rongmeis always had the myth of their common ancestry, and

(c) Zeliangrong Movement

this provided the opportunity for leaders of these tribes to combine themselves into a single group, and thus the prefix of each of these three group- names were combined into one name i.e. the Zeliangrong. (Ze= Zemeis, liang= Liangmeis and Rong= Rongmeis- Kabuis). It was in a large meeting held in Manipur on 15th February, 1947 A.D., at Keisamthong village that the word ‘Zeliangrong’ was coined and adopted. ¹²Thus, the Kabui rebellion developed into a greater Zeliangrong movement which later on aimed at furthering the economic, social, educational and political advancement of the component groups of people.

Movement for Reforms:

The reign of Maharaj Churachand Singh also witnessed the birth of new political, social and religious organisations and movements of far-reaching consequences. ¹³“In the field of socio-economic reforms, an organisation under the name and style of ‘Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha’ was started in 1934 A.D. with the King as the president who presided over both the Inaugural Session (1934) at Imphal and the Second Annual Session (1936) at Silchar (Assam). The third session was held at Mandalay (Burma) in 1937 and it reflected some of the

Socio-economic
Reform Movements

political scenario in India. The fourth session at Imphal (1936) took a political stand and was renamed Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. Finally it assumed the name of ‘Manipur Congress’ in 1946 by a resolution. Another socio-economic

movement was led by a great revolutionary, Hijam Irabat Singh. He was totally against feudalism, and a champion of the cause of the artisan and the agriculture population. He worked for the elimination of the evils of feudalism, revision of land tenure system, the cessation of forced labour and the removal of oppressive taxation. However, his progressive ideas land him in troubles later on. Soon he earned the disfavour of the Maharaja and his government under British tutelage when the movement under him aimed at the elimination of monarchy and the establishment of a popular responsible government in its place.

Revivalist Movement:

Hinduism, as has been discussed in the early chapters became well-established in Manipur. 'The people of the valley were proud to be Hindus, and legitimately boast of their artistic expressions which won for them increasing recognitions not only in India but also abroad'. But during the 30's of the 20th century, a Meitei revivalist, Naoria Phulo of Cachar (Assam), started a religious organisation, 'the Apokpa Marup' with its accent on old Meitei gods and goddesses like Senamahi and

The Apokpa
Marup

Pakhangba. Through his organisation he called upon the Meiteis to re-establish their Mongolian identity by renouncing the Hindu one, to revive their old animistic culture and to reform the Meitei society. He even advocated the change of the name of the state from Manipur to 'Kangleipak'. All the Hindus and the Vaishnavites are required either to embrace the revived old faith and stay, or to go out of the land with their faiths and beliefs. To sum up, the aim of this revavilist movement was to substitute the colourful multi-ethnic composite culture of Manipur by the uni-ethnic Meteи culture. But this movement could not gain much ground in Manipur because of two factors- one, Manipur is a land of rich diversity of its population and culture; hence the attempt of one ethnic clan, whatever dominant it might be, to impose its culture is not easily acceptable to others; and the

other is— for centuries Hindusim have been orienting the religious and social life of the people. Hence majority of the people found it difficult to move away from their existing deep cultural moorings.

On the Manipuris living outside Manipur also, (i.e. in Assam, Tripura and Sylhet) the impact of the movement at first was practically nil. When the ¹⁴British Assam Franchise Committee in 1931 A.D. enumerated the entire Manipuri population as ‘tribal people’, all Manipuris, both the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas, came under the banner of “The Surma Valley Manipuri Association” and strongly protested against the decision of the Government. They produced several historical documents to prove that all Manipuris, whether Bishnupriya or Meitei,

Impact of Apokpa
Marup outside
Manipur.

are ‘caste Hindus’. Consequently, the Government withdrew the notification and Dr. J.H. Hutton, D.Sc., CIE, Census Commissioner of India sent a letter from Simla on October 12, 1932 to Srijut Hemchandrajit Rajkumar Vidyandhi, a Bishnupriya Manipuri Scholar, who was the then President of the said Association informing the withdrawal of the notification, and recognising the Manipuris as ‘caste Hindus’. Maharaj Churachand Singh, CIE, KCSI, King of Manipur, by a letter sent from Imphal appreciated the efforts of the Association concerned. In this regard, mention may be made of the unkind fate of one of the active members of the Association, Raj Babu Sinha, a spirited Bishnupriya Manipuri of Machchughat village of Cachar. He contributed greatly in the movement of the Association as its Secretary. One day he went in the morning to the D.C’s Office at Silchar where he was an employee but did not return in the evening. Two or three days later, his dead body was found floating down the river Barak. How this sad incident occurred has remained upto now a mystery. A person, who thus contributed greatly for the establishment of the Manipuris as Caste Hindus, lost his life under mysterious circumstances. His untimely death is a great loss to the entire Manipuri community.

Women's Movement (Nupi-lan):

Another significant development during the reign of Maharaj Chruachand Singh was the Movements of the women, popularly known as the 'Nupi-lan'. (Nupi=women, lan=war). To the world outside, Manipur is a land famous by its women through dancing and weaving. But they are also found not lagging behind their male counterparts in political consciousness. Women here are always ready to take mass political action if any action of the government affect their interest as well as the interest of the nation. Two such women movements occurred during the reign of Maharaj Churachand Singh- once in 1904 A.D. and the other in 1939 A.D.

In 1904 A.D., when the house of the Assistant Political Agent was burnt down by some unknown persons, the British Resident, Maxwell suspected it as an intentional act of defiance of the British authority. As an example and a warning to those responsible, he ordered the general public to collect materials and rebuild the house. This oppressive action was protested by the people. When their protest went in vain, women went into action protesting and demonstrating against the order of Maxwell. The impact of the demonstration was so great that the Government had to import army from outside. This was the first 'Nupilan'.

“¹⁵A few years later, the women were again on the war-path. Sometimes in 1930 A.D., the Government decided to introduce a new tax. The women resented it. The President of the Durbar, an Englishman, was earnest about the new impost. When he came to check up on reported resistance, the women bundled him into a pond. Later his successor, a certain Stewart came within an ace of plummeting into more dangerous waters. There was a dispute about fishing in the Loktak lake, and he came to enquire into it. Stewart put out in a boat with some leaders of the area while crowd of angry women screaming abuse stood on the shore. The decision Stewart took was bang in tune with the womens demand”.

The second serious women movement took place in 1939 A.D. In December-January of 1938-1939 A.D., the harvest in Manipur was not satisfactory. To check the rise of the price of rice, the women filed a petition to the Durbar to stop its export, and demanded the issue of an announcement with that effect immediately. The president of the Durbar, a man named Sharpe, pleaded inability to comply on the ground that the Second Nupi-lan Maharaja, whose prerogative it was to sanction the ban, was out of station. He, however, left for the telegraph office, the women following him. Sharpe sent his message to the Maharaja and felt his duty was done; but the women requested him to stay on till the reply was recieved. It was a gherao, and Sharpe was unable to move out from there. By afternoon, a platoon of Assam Rifles arrived led by a British Officer. Some of the women were thrown out of the veranda and many were charged, and in the action twenty women recieved bayonet wounds. Still, they held their ground till 10 O'clock in the morning in the ice-cold weather there. This women's movement ended with complete success. The very next day came words from the Maharaja sanctioning the imposition of the ban concerned. The Nupi-lans, as narrated above, clearly demonstrate one of the unique features of the people of the land. It is the perfect equality in all spheres between the men and the women. "It is here that", as one historian observes, "one finds equality between the sexes achieved in a very harmonius setting".

Achievements of Maharaj Churachand Singh :

Maharaja Churachand Singh was a monarch who was endowed with all the good qualities of head and heart. His desire to work for the welfare of the state and the people was intense, but his administrative power to do so was limited. As per the conditions of the 'Sanad' given to him by the Governor-General in Council on 18th September, 1891 A.D., he was to follow all orders of the British Government with regard to the administration of his territories, the control of the hill tribes

dependant upon Manipur, composition of the armed forces of the state, and any other matter in which the British Government may be pleased to intervene. Thus, following the spirit of the 'Sanad' he checked the infiltration of the liberal ideas and the movements current in the Indian sub-continent into Manipur, and rendered the British Government all possible help in its war-efforts during the First and the Second World Wars. With his limited administrative powers, the services which he rendered for the development of his state and the welfare of his people were immense and invaluable. He could realise that the root of all developments was education, and so kept the department of education under his direct control. He began to provide facilities of higher education of boys and girls by converting the 'minor schools' into 'high schools'. Under his initiative Meitei Manipuri language and literature recieved tremendous developments. Manipuri dance, specially the Vaishnavite dances which chiefly present varieties of 'rasas' and 'bhangis', received acclamation everywhere. He, like his predecessors, was extremely religious. His attachment with Vaishnavism was hearty, and at different times, he went out on pilgrimage to important places connected with Vaishnava religion. Being very old, on September, 1941 A.D. he abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son, Budhachandra Singh and left for Nabadwip. He breathed his last there in November of the same year.

Maharaja Budhachandra Singh (1941 A.D. to 1955 A.D.)

Maharaja Churachand Singh had three sons- Budhachandra, Priyabrata and Lokendra. He made proper arrangements for the education of his sons, and sent his eldest son Budhachandra Singh to England in 1922 A.D. and the two younger sons, Priyabrata and Lokendra to Allahabad and Mayo College respectively. Maharaja Churachand Singh, being old and having the desire to go on pilgrimage, abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son, Budhachandra Singh,

who accordingly ascended the throne of Manipur in 1941 A.D. and reigned till his death in 1955 A.D. Maharaja Budhachandra Singh was a well-educated gentleman with a sober temperament. But he was the most unfortunate monarch ever sat on the throne; because, immediately

Problems
he faced

after accession he was confronted with serious external and internal problems. So far as the external problem was concerned, he was to steer clear the state from the flames of the Second World War (1939 A.D. to 1945 A.D.) which engulfed Manipur when Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose entered into Manipur with his 'Ajad Hind Fauj' in his historic march to free his motherland India from the British domination. The internal problems which he faced were also no less dangerous. 'The brief period of his reign was disturbed by actions of the disintegrating forces in the Northern hills as well as revolutionary insurrections in the Valley'. Moreover, he was to deal with the constitutional movement which aimed at the removal of monarchy and the establishment of a responsible government in its place, and also with the issue of Merger of Manipur with the newly emerged independent Indian Union.

Second World War and Manipur:

In course of the Second World War, a serious situation occurred for the Allies in the eastern theatre when Japan entered into it taking the side of the Axis Powers and by making friendship with the foremost revolutionary leader of India, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The objectives of the Japanese and Netaji were different, no doubt; but their enmity against Britain was common. The Japanese wanted to utilise the services of Netaji and his national army to fulfil their imperial interest of crippling the Anglo-American forces there, while Netaji's aim was to exploit this international situation to obtain the liberation of India from the British yoke. Under these circumstances Japanese came to the help of Netaji with economic and military aids. Accordingly, the INA Brigade

of Netaji, assisted by the Japanese army, went out with their famous battle cry, 'Chalo Delhi' i.e. on to Delhi. Soon Andaman and Nicobar islands were liberated and renamed 'Saheed and Swaraj islands'. The victorious INA Brigade and the Japanese army occupied upto Burma where they began to mobilise their forces for an attack on India. It took

Japanese bombing
and chaos in Imphal

two years to complete this army mobilisation. Although the land invasion thus was delayed, bombing by the Japanese planes continued all through. "16 Imphal became the target of intermittent bombing since the second week of May 1942 A.D. The Manipuris, then having no means to defend themselves from air attack, began to shift in distant villages in large numbers..... After the first raid, most of the Police Force deserted their posts and the S.P. issued an order on May 11 suspending the function of the Police. There were looting in the Imphal town, and to a very great extent, lawlessness and disorder prevailed all over the Valley. During the second raid (16th May 1942 A.D.) a number of dangerous criminals escaped from the Manipur State Jail. The army had been called in for performing Police duty".

At this posture of events, the British Government was very much alarmed. It could realise that if the I.N.A. could succeed in entering any populous area of India, then it would surely have started countrywide volcanic eruption against the British. Therefore, the British Government, to keep the advance of the I.N.A. forces under Netaji Subhas secret, issued repeated announcements through all the medias that the Japanese forces were invading India. They also prevailed upon Maharaja Budhachandra to keep the Manipuris detached from the I.N.A. However, this attempt of the British Government and of the Maharaja met with

Anxiety of
the British
Government

little success. Soon many of the people could discover that it was the national army of Netaji Subhas (with the help of the Japanese) who were coming to liberate India with whom they had already developed a sense of political and cultural A.D.

oneness. Moreover, the patriotic Manipuris could never forget the facts that it was the Britishers who destroyed the political sovereignty of Manipur, humiliated her monarchs and princes, and hanged their beloved patriots like Tikendrajit Singh and Thangal General, etc. Hence a good number of patriotic Manipuris both men and women, went over to the forces of Netaji and fought bravely against the British army.

By the early part of 1944 A.D., three divisions of the I.N.A. crossed the Burma border, pushed back one by one the British forces, entered into Manipur and Kohima and hoisted the free India's banner there amidst deafening cries of 'Jai Hind' and 'Netaji Zindabad'.¹⁷ "During the onslaught of Netaji's forces along with the

Help to I.N.A. by Manipuri women.

Japanese many Manipuri women openly aligned themselves with the men of the I.N.A. They gave succour to the freedom fighters, helped them to get food and supplies, led them through bypasses and little-known routes onward towards Kohima from where the I.N.A. hoped to come down to the plains of Assam".

At the climax of their success, the Ajad Hind Fauj established their dominance over about 1500 sq.miles of Manipur and kept encircled the 'Allied Forces' numbering about sixty thousand. But fortune at last smiled on the Allied Power. Their combined Air Force snatched away the dominance in the sky over the area, and began hurriedly carrying allied troops there to relieve their army from the sieze of the Ajad Hind Fauj. ¹⁸The 5th British Indian Division was flown to Imphal from the Arakan Front and the 7th Indian Division was flown to Dimapur which halted the rapid advance of the Ajad Hind Fauj. Finally, non-availability of further reinforcements from the Japanese who by the mean time themselves were put in a helpless condition at home, and the huge numerical superiority of the allied army, rendered the Ajad Hind Fauj incapable of holding the ground any more, and subsequently were compelled to retreat. In the order issued to the Officers and other ranks

of his organisation on 24th April, 1945 A.D. Netaji accepted the failure in the attempt with a hope of future success. In it, he had expressed, “¹⁹In Imphal and Burma we have suffered a reverse in the first round in our fight for independence. But it is only the first round, we have many more rounds to fight, I am a born optimist and I shall not admit defeat under any circumstances.”

Internal Problems:

The British paramountcy over the Indian Native States came to an end on 15th August, 1947 A.D. The Maharaja of Manipur gained full control over the administration of the state once again after a long period. But at this juncture, Manipur was at a very critical point of her history. Maharaja Budhachandra had to deal with three serious problems- the first one was the movement of disintegration led by the Mao Nagas in the northern hills, the second one was the constitutional movement for the establishment of a responsible government in the state, and the third one was the issue of Merger of Manipur state with the Indian Union.

(1) Movement of the Mao Nagas:

In 1948 A.d. the Mao Nagas of northern hills of Manipur led a movement, and it was ethnic in character. The Mao Nagas, on consideration of ethnic and cultural affinities, demanded for their separation from Manipur for the merger of their area with Naga Hills (Assam), the land of their kinsmen. Defying the authority of the Manipur Government they started collecting house tax and taxes on the movement of local products such as potato, maize, cabbages, etc. The government took prompt action against its leaders and the movement subsided soon.

(2) Constitutional Agitation:

“The demand for the establishment of a responsible government in Manipur is closely related with the birth of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha, a socio-religious organisation which was established under the patronage of Maharaja of Manipur (Churachand Singh) in 1934

Formation of
a responsible
Government.

The Mahasabha had all the leading personalities of Manipur in its membership list. The influence of the political development in the Indian mainland and the Indian national movement activated these elite to seek a change in the nature of the colonial rule as well as the monarchical autocracy". With this aim in view, the Mahasabha was converted into a political organisation, and changed its name into 'Manipur State Congress'. During the beginning of the reign of Maharaj Budhachandra Singh, a massive agitation was launched for the establishment of a constitutional government, and it was joined by almost all the political parties- the Manipur State Congress, Praja Sanmelani, Manipur Krishak Sabha, etc. The Maharaja, after regaining full sovereignty over the state as a result of British withdrawal of paramountcy over the Native States in 1947 A.D., began to oppose the agitation and tried slowly and gradually to revive the old autocratic rule in the land. At this, the people intensified their agitation. Demonstrations and picketings in front of state offices and at the residences of the government officials were resorted to. This non-stop agitation completely paralysed the function of the government and normal life in Manipur. This compelled the Maharaja to yield to the people's demand. Accordingly, election was held on June 11, 1948 A.D. ²¹"No party could secure an absolute majority in the election although Congress emerged as the single largest majority. Consequently, a non-Congress coalition government was formed, and Maharajkumar Priyabrata Singh, brother of the Maharaja, became the first Chief Minister". Thus was formed for the first time in the history of Manipur a government by the elected representatives of the people, which made the monarchy a constitutional one.

(3) Issue of Manipur's Merger with Indian Union:

Immediately after the Second World War, the British Government announced its determination to exit from India. In that case it was informed, its doctrine of paramountcy would lapse, and the Native states,

numbering 562 at that time, would be free to accede to any one of the two successor governments or proclaim their independence. Lord Mount Batten hastily summoned a Conference of Princes to sign the 'Instrument of Accessions' (Merger document) incorporating their own terms and

Birth of two
dominions-India
and Pakistan

conditions to avoid future complications. Actually the British rule came to an end on 15th of August, 1947 A.D. as per the provision of the Indian Independence Act, and the British Indian Government was succeeded by the Governments of two independent 'Dominions' - India and Pakistan. Accordingly by August 15, 1947 A.D., almost all the rulers of the Native States, except of Hyderabad, Kashmir, Junagard, Tripura and Manipur, signed the Instrument of Accession.

So far as the State of Manipur was concerned, the people were divided in their opinions on the question of her future political status. Manipur already had, as discussed earlier, an 'Assembly' constituted by people's representatives after a long struggle for responsible government. A section of the people were in favour of maintaining her existing status as Sovereign Constitutional Monarchy. But the majority of her people wanted merger with the Indian Dominion under the influence of certain factors. Although all along Manipur had remained outside the Indian political panorama, she had been in contacts with India, both of commercial and cultural, since the ancient times. This brought in the

Divided opinion
on merger issue

Manipuri mind an inclination towards the mainstream of the Indian life and culture. This inclination of the people towards India reached its climax by the 18th century on account of the entry of Vaishnavism there, its subsequent acceptance as the state religion, the completion of the process of 'Sanskritisation' of its society, and lastly, with the development of its close political contact with India as a result of the establishment of the control of the British Indian Government there.

The stand of the Indian National Congress on the issue was in favour of its merger with the Indian Dominion. It was totally against its separate identity outside India. The Indian Government also desired to settle the merger issue by means of 'conciliation and pressure'. As a first step they asked the Maharaja to sign the Stand-Still Agreement.²² The Maharaja desired to establish a close relationship between Manipur and the dominion of India, and hence he agreed to the conditions of the 'Stand-Still Agreement', and signed it on August 11, 1947 A.D. According to it the Govt of Manipur accepted to entrust the responsibilities of defence, communication and external affairs to the care of the Indian Government. Apart from this, other ancillary subjects like custom, excise and coinage, etc. were also surrendered to the Government of India. The internal administration was the sole authority of the Maharaja, and the Government of India assured the protection of internal autonomy and authority of Manipur. But unfortunately it had not specified the future political status of Manipur".

After the transfer of power in 1947 A.D., the Government of the Dominion of India, as the successor government stepped into the shoes of the British Indian Government and then tried to establish its control over the administration of Manipur. The post of the Political Agent was abolished and in its place a 'Dewan' was appointed. The function of the Dewan was general supervision and guidance in the matters relating to the administration of the state. The Government of India's desire to merge Manipur into Indian Union was further hastened by its 'Communist Phobia'. It feared the activities of Hjam Irabat Singh, the revolutionary leader of Manipur who by that time turned into a confirmed communist. The Government felt that the sieze of Manipur was essential to stop the march of communism into the mainland of India. So, by the middle of 1949 A.D. the Government of India had

Stand of the State
Congress for merger

decided to integrate Manipur within the Indian Union. With this aim in view, it prevailed upon the Manipur State Congress to accomplish the act of merger. Accordingly

on 15th of August 1949 A.D., the Manipur State Congress celebrated the Independence Day at Imphal hoisting the National Flag amidst loud shouting of slogans- 'Banda Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'.

The issue of merger was, however, opposed by other political organisations of the state. The Youth Socialist League, the Manipur Students Federation and the Communist Party accused the Manipur State Congress for their act of selling Manipur to India and appealed to the people through public meetings and processions to oppose their deceitful plan. All the members of the Communist Party in the Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution opposing the proposed merger. As against this, the Manipur State Congress also adopted a resolution favouring strongly the merger.

Thus the political situation in Manipur became extremely chaotic and troublesome. In this troublesome political situation, the Government of India was eagerly awaiting for an opportunity to fulfil its objective; and the opportunity presented itself when Maharaja Budhachandra Singh on a personal tour went to Shillong, the capital of Assam on 17th September 1949 A.D. The Governor of Assam, Sriprakash seized this unexpected opportunity. On the instruction of the Central Government, the Governor Sriprakash recieved the Maharaja with due honour and offered him extreme hospitality. He then informed the Maharaja that the Government of India instructed him to complete the negotiation regarding the merger of his state before 20th September, 1949 A.D. The Maharaja felt extremely uneasy at this sudden proposition. He mildly expressed his inability to do so on constitutional ground and wrote to the Governor:

“Direct dealing with me was feasible when sovereignty was vested in me but after the introduction of the State Constitution Act, the sovereignty and administration of the state has been shifted to the people”.

He then expressed his desire to consult his people so that his action in this regard might not in any case be unconstitutional. No doubt, it was a wise suggestion. Maharaja Budhachandra Singh was very popular; if given opportunity, he might have procured the consent of his people in favour of the merger. In that case, the question of unconstitutionality of the Act, which later on was raised off and on in some quarters would not have arisen. Anyway, the desire of the Maharaja was referred to the Home Ministry at Delhi. The Home Ministry,

Merger of
Manipur
accomplished

however, felt it necessary to accomplish the matter in a hurry, because the movements launched by certain political organisations there were gradually taking the people of Manipur away from the mainstream of the great Indian culture and political ideology. In this regard, special mention may be made of the movement of the 'Manipur Krishak Sabha' under the leadership of Hijam Irabat Singh. It aimed at establishing an 'Independent Peasant Republic'. The Government of India viewed it as a part of the International Communist Movement which had been rocking violently different parts of India, Burma and South-east Asia. At this posture of events, the Government of India considered the settlement of the issue of merger of Manipur earlier the better.

Hence Sardar Ballavbhai Patel, the then Home Minister of India, had to bypass the suggestion of the Maharaja. Rather, he requested him to accomplish the matter at the earliest in the interest of the people of Manipur, in particular, and of our great Indian nation, in general. Realising the urgent necessity of the settlement of the issue, Maharaja Budhachandra Singh at last agreed to the proposal of Sardar Patel. Accordingly, the Governor of Assam, Sriprakash, representing the Indian side, sat on negotiation with the Maharaja to finalise the terms of the agreement. The Merger Agreement, better known as the Instrument of Accession, was prepared incorporating all the additions and amendments made during the discussion. Maharaja Budhachandra Singh put his royal signature on the Merger Agreement, the Instrument of Accession on 21st September, 1949 A.D. This historic deal, under the stricture from

the Home Ministry, was kept secret for a time and was officially announced on the 18th October, 1949 A.D. when the Maharaja was back to Imphal. Accordingly, the post of 'Dewan' (the Dominion Agent) was abolished, and Manipur was converted into a 'Part C State' administered by a Chief Commissioner. Thus was Manipur integrated with the Indian Union. Maharaja Budhachandra was pensioned off, and with his removal from power, the institution of monarchy came to an end in Manipur for ever.

Though relieved of his administrative responsibilities, Maharaja Budhachandra Singh continued to give leadership in the social and religious fields. He kept himself busy in different games and cultural activities. He was extremely benevolent. He loved his kingdom and his people from the core of his heart. During the Second World War, when the Japanese, as discussed earlier, turned Manipur into a dangerous battle ground by repeated arial bombings,²³ the military authorities suggested to the Maharaja that he and his household be evacuated at a safer place in India, and even an aircraft was arranged for that purpose. The king turned it down saying that he could not leave his people and his state, and he would fight to the last'. He also sincerely worked throughout his life for the preservation of the territorial integrity of his kingdom and the unity of his people. With this aim in view, he undertook extensive tours in the villages both in the hills and the plains financing himself from his own Privy Purse; and dealt with all people without any discrimination on the grounds of religion, ethnicity and geographical locations. He was, like his forefathers, a devout Hindu and observed its rights and ways of life with utmost sincerity and devotion. He did not, however, ignore the Meitei traditional faith and culture. He encouraged the Meitei 'Lai-Haraoba' and folk dance 'Thabal Chongba' all over the state. 'He spent most of his last days in Goura Nagar at the foot of the Nongmaijing hills, which he himself established and where he worshipped both the Meitei and the Hindu Lais'. Maharaja Budhachandra Singh died in Dec. 1955 A.D.

Achievements of
Budhachandra Singh.

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Chapter :- XI
Societies of Manipur-
Hill Society and Valley Society

The mass of the people in Manipur is a composite one which consisted of the Mongoloids, Aryans, Dravidians, Pongs, Austroloids, Siamese, etc. Different ethnic tribes and clans belonging to these human races have been living in the land since the remote past. It is very difficult to find out the details about them because, there are no written records about them. The oral traditions of these peoples are also not of much help because later additions and subtractions render them unreliable as guides to history. Under these circumstances it is also very difficult to say who went there first and in what order the others entered into this land.

For convenience, the people of Manipur may be studied under two broad heads- tribals and non-tribals. The tribal people are predominantly Mongoloid. They came in successive waves, mainly from the north and north-east. According to their habitat, they may again be classed as hill tribes and plain tribes. So far as the hill people are concerned, there are 29 tribes recognized by the Government of Manipur; and these have been put into three categories- the Naga Group of tribes, the Chin-Kuki- Mizo Group of tribes, and the Intermediary Groups. This is the official classification as per the 1981 census, but in a writing of 1976 it was mentioned that the tribal population of present Manipur state is broadly divided into two ethnic groups- the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins.

Hill Societies :

According to the official list the Naga Group of Tribes consists of the following:

1. The Kabuis (Rongmei and Puimei)
2. Kacha Nagas, (Liangmei and Zemei), collectively known as Zeliangrong.

3. Mao,
4. Maram,
5. Tangkhul,
6. Maring.

Among the Naga tribes the Kabuis form a large group and they reside mainly in the west of Manipur. The original name of the Kabui was 'Mpui' which the British administrations distorted as Kabui. The Kacha Nagas and the Rongmeis are allied tribes. They live in the Tamenglong sub-division in the western hills of Manipur. The Maos, the Marams and the Tangkhuls live in Mao and Sadar hills bordering Nagaland. The Tangkhuls are considered one of the oldest Naga tribes who came to Manipur. From the records of Manipur we gather some rather important facts regarding the antiquity of the Tangkhuls. They settled in the areas they now occupy at an early date, it is believed, when the Meiteis, now their masters, "were yet wild and untouched by the finer arts of life". The Marings and some other tribes of the 'Intermediary Group' like the Moyons, Monsangs, Anals, etc. occupy the Tengnoupal region in the south-west bordering Burma.

The Nagas live for centuries in the hills where means of communication were very primitive, and hence they live in complete isolation in the areas of their settlements. Practically they never consider themselves as Manipuris, and identify themselves by the names of their respective clans. Recently, however, on account of the development of education, the rapid economic development, and the improved means of communication, their days of isolated life, interclan feuds and struggle for livelihood are rapidly diminishing. Their outlook is changing which is paving the ground for the development of a fellow-feeling among them. As a result of it, two movements are nowadays noticed among the Naga tribes. One is the movement for the formation of a sub-nationhood on the basis of ethnic unity. The outward expression of this move in the

political plane is found in demand for the integration of those areas of Manipur inhabited by the Nagas with the adjacent state, Nagaland. The other Naga movement is the Zeliangrong movement. The movement is about the three numerically less Naga tribal groups- the Zemes, the Liangmeis and the Rongmeis. These three Naga sub-tribes have more or less similar customary laws, traditional customs, folk-songs, folk-dances and folk-lore, etc. The only difference among these three sub-tribes is that they have distinctive dialects of their own. But this small linguistic difference is neutralised by the fact that the Liangmei Naga dialect is more or less understood by the people of these three sub-tribes. In view of their affinities among themselves, these people are engaged in efforts to forge, stabilise and project a common 'Zeliangrong' identity. The prominent leaders of this movement are Jadonang, a young Rongmei Naga and his cousin Gaidinliu.

Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of Tribes

This group of people consists of Gangte, Hmar, Mizo (Lushai), Thadou (Kuki), Vaiphei, Zou, Paite, Simte, etc. Ethnologically they belong to the Kuki-Chin family. These tribes live in the Sadar hills, Jiribam and Tengnoupal. They have their maximum concentration in Churachandpur which is fast developing into a modern township, and in order of importance second only to Imphal, the capital of the state. The people of this group of tribes have affinities with the Chins of Burma and the Mizos of the Mizoram state.

Unlike the Naga tribes, the tribes of the Kuki-chin family are not eager to form a sub-nation. They prefer to be identified individually by the names of their respective tribes. A process of atomisation seems to have been set in motion among them. At first the Hmars, Thadous Paites, etc. broke away from the Kukis claiming themselves to be distinct ethnic groups. The Thadous, who constituted the core of the Kukis, however, continued to hold the Kuki identity. But later on

they had also witnessed disintegration among themselves. ²“At a later stage some other Sub-Tribes of the Thadous like Haokips, Kipgens, etc. started claiming their separate entities.”

The Hmars are also another prominent tribe of this group. According to popular traditions, the ancient home of the Hmar people is ‘Sinlung’ but opinions differ on its exact location. A Hmar historian, Hranglien Songate identifies it with present ‘Tailing’ or ‘Sinlung’ in South-east China. Some others, on the other hand, locate it in central China. Mr.R.Pudaite, in his booklet, “The Education of the Hmar people”, observes, “whether or not we are able to trace the exact location of

Hmar Community

Sinlung, it appears historically evident that the Hmars originally came from central China, following one of the mass migrations, especially those of the late Pre-Christian and early Christian centuries. The Hmars left Sinlung because of waves of Chinese immigrants, and political pressure drove them away to the South. The exact time of departure from Sinlung, and the original route they followed is not known. However, traces have been found in poems and legends that they came to the Himalayas. The great mountain made it impossible for them to continue their southward journey; so they turned eastwards from there. Shortly, they turned towards eastwards and met a tribe who were ahead of them. This Tribe, known to them as Mishmis, showed friendliness to them, and they settled among them for over a generation.

In course of time they moved further eastwards in search of a new home. They then settled in the territories which formed the ‘Shan State’. Their settlement in the ‘Shan State’ took place sometimes in the 8th Century A.D. After a considerable period of stay there in peace and prosperity, they again fell in a misfortune. A severe famine broke out; and the Hmars, along with the Lushais and the Kukis, moved turning towards the west and settled in different vacant lands along the Indo-Burmese frontier. In this process, they are now found settled in Mizoram,

in the Cachar district of Assam, in Tripura, in Manipur and in the North-western part of modern Myanmar.

The Hmars have their maximum concentration in the territory now called Churachandpur. The British Indian Government, in order to check the Burmese advance towards India, encouraged the Raja of Manipur to strengthen his power and position. Being emboldened by this favourable British attitude, the Raja of Manipur, occupied this Hmar territory and named it Churachandpur. Since then the Hmars have become an ethnic tribe of Manipur.

Valley Society

In the absence of written records, it is very difficult to identify the autochthons- the original or earliest people-of the Valley of Manipur. However, we can speculate about them on the basis of informations provided by traditions. According to local traditions, the valley was originally inhabited by several ethnic clans among which the prominent were the Khabas, Moirangs, Angoms, and the Chengleis. Later on by the beginning of the Christian era the remnants of the migrating great human races, both from the west and the east, formed new clans in the valley. The Indo-Aryans in course of their migration left their remnants who formed a distinct clan in the Valley. They were the Vedic Kshatriyas, and probably for this reason they came to be known as the Khamuls- ('Kha' stands for Kshatriya and 'Mul' for the root or original.). In course of time they carved out a principality of their own in the valley with their headquarter at a place which they named Bishnupur after the name of their supreme deity, Lord Vishnu whose image they installed there. The other four clans, namely, the Moirangs, Angoms, Luwangs and the Mangangs, referred to in the epic, the Mahabharata and the Puranas as 'Gandharvas' and 'Kiratas' were racially Indo-Mongoloids but later on adopted many of Aryan customs and cultures under the influence of the Khamuls. All these clans- Aryan and Aryanised, lived in separate

principalities in the valley; and as all these principalities were situated around Bishnupur, they were collectively known as the Bishnupurias-
Pancha-Bishnupurias a term later on contracted into Bisnupriyas. It is these Bishnupriya clans who formed the first united political organisation in the Valley, the ³“Pancha- Bishnupriyas” and gave the land a common name, ‘Manipur’ which means ‘the land of Jewels’. The component clans of the Pancha- Bishnupriyas for centuries ruled the land in succession. The Khamuls were said to be the most powerful among them, followed by the Moirangs and the Angoms.

Almost at the same period a tribe of the Mongoloids, - the Tibeto-Burmans moved over the land from the east and the remnants which they left also formed new clans- the Meiteis, Khendes, Chirens, etc. At
Salai Taret first these clans settled, as is known from their beliefs and folk-traditions, in the hilly regions adjacent to the valley. Later on, the fertility of the soil and the easy means of livelihood of the valley caused these hill-hardy people to descend and settled there permanently. In course of time the Meiteis, who emerged the most dominant, subdued all the other clans of the valley and established their dominance over them. Remaining under the Meitei dominance continuously for centuries, many of the clans lost their individual identities and got themselves almost amalgamated with them. Thus originated a new social formation, which the Meitei tradition and the ‘Puyas’ (Meitei Purans) refer to as the ‘Salai Taret’ of the Meitei clan (seven sub- clans of the same people). In this way, under the operation of the process of shifting of affiliations, and of fission and fusion, the Valley society witnessed the disappearance of old clans and the appearance of new social formation and some new classes of people.

The Meiteis

The most dominant and the most populous clan of Manipur is the Meitei clan. Their origin, like of almost all other clans, is shrouded in

mystery. The theories put forward by different scholars regarding their origin are highly speculative and controversial. Who these people are? When and where from they came? – are the questions which could not be answered definitely upto now. According to myths current among the Meiteis, it is believed that Meiteis are the autochthons- the earliest inhabitants of the land. They ruled Manipur continuously from the 1st century A.D. to 1947 A.D. and after that it acceded to the Indian Union. The first ruler of this clan was Pakhangba, and he was followed, according to their Royal chronicles by 75 other kings of the clan. This view is unacceptable on the following grounds. First, myths are not history; secondly, the Royal Chronicles which furnish the genealogy of the kings are the compositions of the 17th and 18th centuries; and lastly, the continuous rule of a clan for a period of almost 2000 years over a land is unhistorical and so, unbelievable.

Origin of the
Meiteis

Some scholars also have tried to establish the early settlement of the Meiteis by tracing an Aryan descent. They like to prove that Manipur was settled by the Aryans in the early times. They further claim that 'Poireiton' who came to Manipur in 33 A.D. was an Aryan priest. The weight of this theory is that the Meiteis are the original people of Manipur, and are the descendants of the Aryans. This theory is also no longer tenable on the grounds that the physical features of the Meiteis are different to a large extent with those of the Aryans, and their language is definitely not an Indo-Aryan language.

Some, however, say that Meiteis belonged to the 'Moi' section of the great 'Tai' race. But this theory of 'Moi-Tai' origin is also rejected by Hodson on the basis of the Meitei being a Tibeto-Burman language, and the Tai being of the Siamese- Chinese linguistic family. Though the theory is thus discarded on the linguistic ground, the absorption of many of the Tai people in the Meitei clan since the 8th century, more actually since the 15th century A.D. has been recorded in the chronicles of Manipur.

G.A.Grierson in his monumental 'Linguistic survey of India' has grouped the Meitei in the Kuki-chin sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman languages. He assumed that the ancestors of the Meiteis were among the kinsmen who migrated from China to the upper waters of the Irrawady and Chindwin rivers of upper Burma. They lived in the Hukwang Valley of the present land of the Kachins before they moved into the Manipur Valley. But the time of their migration and entry into the Manipur Valley has not yet been definitely established. Historian S.C.Dubey thus appears to be right when he says, "they are the descendants of the Tartar groups who migrated from the North-west China in the 13th and 14th centuries. Grierson and Dr.S.K.Chatterjee have made it more clear when they hold the view that "the Meiteis are the Kuki-Chin section of the Tibeto-Burman stock. They appear to have scattered over the hill areas from Lushai hills and Chittagong". From there they descended to the Manipur Valley, and in course of time established their supremacy over the whole valley by bringing all other clans existing there. Gradually the people of the other clans got merged with them and swelled their population. These association of the Meiteis with the people of the existing clans gave birth to two other social groups or Meitei sub-clans of inferior social status. They are the 'Lois' or 'Chakpois' and the 'Yaithibis'.⁵" "There is" as Dr. Lucy Zehol says, "the general understanding that the Meiteis are Hindus. This interpretation has now become a subject of controversy as the Meiteis, long known to be Hindus, would like to be identified as 'Sanamahis', after the name of their indigeneous religious faith".

Lois or Chakpois

The 'Loi' is a derogatory term which the Meiteis use to identify the people whom they subdued. Now comes the question-who are these subdued people? Col.Johnstone has made a reference to the invasion of Manipur by a Chinese force, and their defeat in 1250 A.D. by the ruler of Manipur. The Chinese prisoners of war were allowed to settle

at a place called Susa Kameng. Their descendants are still living as 'Lois Community' in the Kameng Village, 9 Kms. away from Imphal by the side of Dimapur road.

Again the Lois are also believed to be the descendants of the former inhabitants of Moirang, one of the original tribes which formerly occupied the valley to the south comprising, as Mr. Dun identifies, five villages. They were formerly independent but were reduced to subjection ages ago by the Meiteis. Thereafter, they were reduced into a tributary group. In return for the payment of tribute, the Meitei king allowed them to use Meitei lineage (Sagei) and the title of 'Singh' before and after their names respectively. Chairel, Andro, Sekmai, etc. are the villages inhabited by this people. They are a Hinduised people, but are not recognised as such by the orthodox. They are a degraded people, and are not allowed to participate in social feasts and ceremonies along with the Meiteis.

Yaithibis

In course of time another class of people came into being, whom the Meiteis call as the Yaithibis. The term 'Yaithibi' is also derogatory. It refers to the people of illegal birth and of immoral habits. By illegal birth, it refers to the issues that were born of prohibited mates such as between step-mother and son, brother and sister and so on. By the person of immoral habits, it is meant that they have no religion and pay no regards to the social norms. The literal meaning of the term Yaithibi is the people with bad luck (yai=luck, thibi=bad).

The Yaithibis are also said to be the descendants of the exiled people. Mr. R.K. Saha while conducting a fieldwork for the study of the valley society has collected a story from the people. The story is—king Garib Niwaz (Pamheiba) and his son, Prince Ajit Shai both unfortunately became the rivals for the hand of a beautiful girl, Thambal Nganbi. For this, the relation between the father and the son grew poisoned. Prince

Ajit Shai became very much dissatisfied with his father and the girl concerned. After the death of his father, Ajit Shai ascended the throne. Immediately after his accession, he ordered Thambal Nganbi and her relatives to move to the places far away from the Meiteis. The descendants of this exiled people in course of time came to be known as the Yaithibis. They were reduced to the lowest status in the society. Mr. Brown observes, "The Eithibeas (Yaithibis) are the exiled people; and they used to perform the scavenger's job in the palace only for the Raja and the family".

The Bishnupriyas

Another prominent group of people of Manipur are the Bishnupriyas. Originally these people lived in the villages in the valley surrounding the Loktak Lake. The highest concentration of this people is found in the Bishnupur district, now known as Bishenpur. During the period between 1970 to 1974 A.D., R.K.Saha, a member of the "Anthropological survey of India", has conducted an intensive anthropological study on the six ethnic groups of people of the Manipur Valley in 19 selected villages. ⁷In the ethnic-wise population data these 19 villages which he has shown in his book, "The Valley Society of Manipur," the Bishnupriya population is found the largest. The principal localities where these people were living are now known as Nachou, Khangabok, Ningthoukhong, Heiruk and Bishenpur.

Loss of political power to the Meiteis, constant internal feuds among the Meitei princes and the repeated Burmese invasions later on caused many of this people to move away in waves from the valley to other parts of the kingdom and outside. In course of their outward movement, some settled in the plainlands of Jiribam. The chief Bishnupriya Manipuri villages in Jiribam are Borobekra, Guakhal, Puthikhal, Dhalakhal and Laisabithal. Outside Manipur they settled in large numbers in the Barak Valley districts of Assam, in Tripura and in Bangladesh.

The Bishnupriyas, still living in Manipur, are now completely overshadowed. Almost all adopted Meitei customs, manners and language. They have totally forgotten their own language under the impact of the dominant Meitei Language. However, they still have retained their ethnic identity and continue to identify themselves either as 'Bishnupriyas' or 'Hindu Manipuris'. Those who now live in Jiribam, in Barak Valley, in Tripura and in Bangladesh identify themselves as 'Bishnupriya Manipuris'. They speak in their own Bishnupriya Manipuri language which is classed as an Indo-Aryan dialect.

As regards their origin, the Bishnupriyas believe that they were one of the earliest groups of immigrants in Manipur. They were as discussed earlier, the descendants of the remnants left by the Aryans on the valley of Manipur in course of their migrations in waves to and from the west to the east. They were thus the descendants of the Vedic Kshatriyas, and so earlier they were known as Khamuls (Kha-Kshatriya, Mul=Root or Original). Later on, as narrated earlier, they came to be known as the Bishnupriyas, and they ruled the valley for centuries. This theory of the origin of the Bishnupriyas finds wider acceptance nowadays because of the following considerations; first this origin is supported by tradition. Tradition says that the Bishnupriyas are the descendants of Babruvahana, son of Arjuna, the third Pandava and Chittrangada, the daughter of the Gandharva king of Manipur. This traditional story gives the hint of the fusion of the Aryans and the autochthons there. Secondly, it is supported by the fact that the Bishnupriyas possess distinct Aryan physical features. Lastly, it is also supported by another fact that the Bishnupriyas in some occasions were referred as "Kha-la-Chais" which in Chinese means 'Children of the great Lake'. The great Lake under reference is invariably the Loktak Lake of Manipur.

Some writers, on the other hand, oppose this indigenous origin of the Bishnupriyas and say that they were the descendants of some Indo-Aryan speaking people who entered into the land from various in

parts of India in the recent past. The Meiteis call them 'Mayangs' i.e. outsiders, being the descendants of the low-caste Bengali Hindus who were taken as prisoners of war by king Khagemba during the 17th century A.D., 120 families of different castes who were brought into the valley by Pamheiba during the 18th century A.D., and 65 Bengali-speaking families who entered into the valley under the leadership of some Dhanapati Rajkumar, also known as 'Koireng Khullakpa', during the reign of Joi Singh, alias Bhagyachandra. The facts given are correct but their interpretations are given in wrong ways prompted perhaps by some motives. The total of the different people of these immigrants under reference makes a figure too small to form an ethnic community in a foreign land in such a short period. The actual thing which happened was the absorption of those people with the Bishnupriyas who were living there since the ancient time on account of their cultural and linguistic affinities.

Therefore, the Bishnupriyas are not the recent immigrants in Manipur. They had been there for centuries since the ancient times. This is supported by the findings of many modern scholars. Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee writes, "The Meitei state was preceeded by the Indo-Aryan Bishnupur state in a small segment of the valley in the early period". Historian R.M. Nath endorses this view when he writes, "The Bishnupriya Manipuris were the first cultured and ruling race in Manipur, but were driven out from power when the Meiteis occupied Manipur Valley in the 18th century A.D."

The Pangans

The tide of Islam reached Manipur also during the beginning of the 17th century A.D. It is said that during the reign of Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.), his rebel younger brother, Sanangba with the help of his brother-in-law, the King of Cachar, invaded Manipur and proceeded upto Laimaton. But he was defeated and killed, and many of his armies,

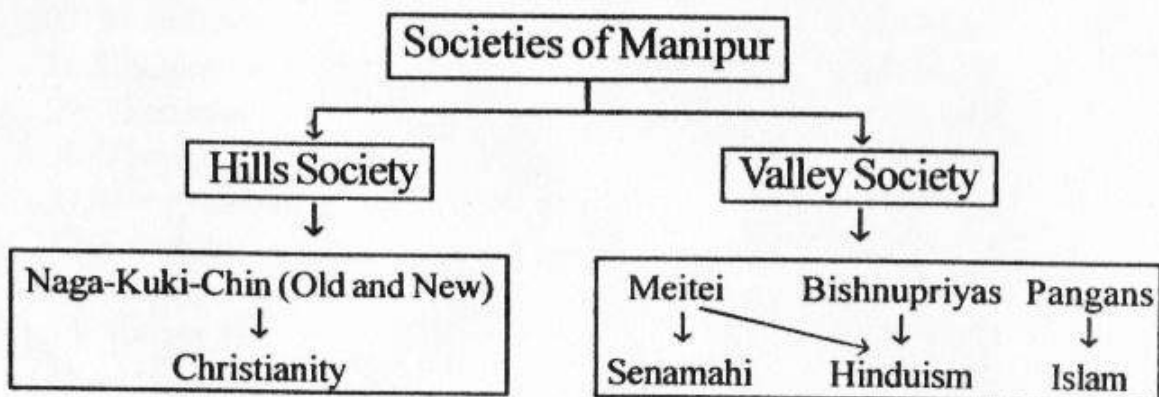
which many Muslim were there, were taken prisoners. However, the king pardoned them and allowed them to settle in Manipur. Again, the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan established good relations with Khagemba. This good relation opened the door of Manipur for the immigration of many Muslim job-seekers and fortune-hunters from the neighbouring territories of Bengal and the United Povinces. In course of time the Muslim immigrants took Meitei wives and adopted Meitei language as their mother tongue. In this way a new community was formed in Manipur which is named by the Meiteis as 'Pangans' and by the Bishnupriyas as "Khai-Pangals" (The Bishnupriyas refer the Meiteis as 'Khai'). It is the Mughal emperor of Delhi, probably Bahadur Shah (1707-1712 A.D.) who conferred upon the next king of Manipur, Gopal Singh (Pamheiba) the honourific title 'Garib Niwaz' for his kind treatment to the immigrant Muslims i.e. the Pangans living there.

The Pangans of Manipur are Mohammedans of the Sunni Sect. They have nowadays completely forgotten their original languages, probably vulgar Bengali or Urdu or Hindusthani, and now they speak in Meitei. In dress and customs, they maintain strict Islamic standards. Formerly, like other subjects, they had to prostrate themselves before the king. After they have made a representation that this was against their religion, King Chandra Kirti Singh (1884-1886 A.D.) excused them from performing that, and allowed them to offer 'Salam' (salute) instead.

Thus, Manipur is the homeland of different distinct ethnic tribes and clans- the off shoots of almost all the great human races. "The mass people of Manipur is a composite one to which the Dravidians, the Mongolians, Aryans, Pongs, Chinese, Siamese, etc. were contributory. Its people also represent the three great religions of the world- Hindusim, Christianity, and Islam. Its society's grandeur is its variety. It is marked by the existence side by side of two different social systems, of the hills

and of the plains – with distinct livings, ways of life and cultures. They are dissimilar in many respects, but have been in co-existence for centuries since the ancient times with complete co-operation and peace. The term 'Manipur' refers to a territory, and so all tribes and clans, - both of the hills and plains, by the very fact of their living within that territory, are Manipuris. However, it was the valley region only which formed the territory of 'ancient Manipur'; and the hilly areas, which are now under present Manipur, were later additions to it. Hence the association of the peoples of the hills and the plains was not very old. The differences in the topography of the dwelling places, in ethnicity, in modes of living, and in social and political institutions – all acted as the barriers between the peoples of these two different topographies. These barriers were further heightened, to a great extent, by the cultural and religious differences. The hill peoples, in general, became Christians whereas the plains peoples, in majority, all long have remained attached to Hinduism of the Vaishnavite sect except a microscopic minority who have recently embraced Islam. Because of these factors perhaps, the enthusiasm of the hill peoples for the assumption of 'Manipuri' nomenclature is found almost nil. Generally the term 'Manipuri' is used to mean the people of the different clans who had been living in the valley since the ancient times.

The picture of the tribes and clans, and the composition of the society of Manipur can be clearly understood from the diagrammatic representation given by Dr. Lucy Zehol as shown below :



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1. Dr. Lucy Zehol - 'Ethnicity in Manipur' P.60
2. J.Roy - 'History of Manipur' P.228
3. Pandit Navakhandra Singh
Sena Singh - 'Khamul Puran'
- 'Manipurer Itihas' P.60
4. S.C. Dubey - 'Indian Society' P.12
5. Dr. Lucy Zehol - 'Ethnicity in Manipur' P.116
6. Bidhan Sinha - 'Cultural History of North-east India' P.27
7. R.K. Saha - 'Valley Society of Manipur' P45-53

APPENDIX

The names and reigns of the Meitei Rajas, and the Maharajas of Manipur as recorded in the clan genealogy and Royal chronicle.

Names	Period of Reigns in AD.
1. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba	33-154
2. Khuiyoi Tompok	154-264
3. Taithingmang	264-364
4. Khui Ningngonba	364-379
5. Pengshiba	379-394
6. Kaokhangba	394-411
7. Naokhamba	411-428
8. Naophangba	428-518
9. Sameirang	518-568
10. Urakonhouba	568-658
11. Naothingkhong	663-763
12. Khongtekcha	763-773
13. Keirencia	784-799
14. Yaaraba	799-821
15. Ayangba	821-910
16. Ningthouching	910-949
17. Chenglei Ipaan Lanthaba	949-969
18. Yanglou Keiphaba	969-984
19. Irengba	984-1064
20. Loiyumba	1074-1122
21. Loitongba	1122-1150
22. Atom Yoiremba	1150-1163
23. Iwanthaba	1163-1195
24. Thawanthaba	1195-1231
25. Chingthang Langthaba	1231-1242
26. Thingbai Shelbongba	1242-1247
27. Puranthaba	1247-1263
28. Khumomba	1263-1278
29. Moiramba	1278-1302
30. Thangbu Langthaba	1302-1324
31. Kongyamba	1324-1335
32. Telheiba	1335-1355
33. Tonaba	1355-1359
34. Tabungba	1359-1394
35. Lairemba	1394-1399

36. Punsiba	1404-1432
37. Ningthou Khomba	1432-1467
38. Kiyamba	1467-1508
39. Koiremba	1508-1512
40. Lamkiyamba	1512-1523
41. Nonginphaba	1523-1524
42. Kabomba	1524-1542
43. Tangjamba	1542-1545
44. Chalamba	1545-1562
45. Mungyamba	1562-1597
46. Khagemba	1597-1652
47. Khunjaoba	1652-1666
48. Paikhomba	1666-1697
49. Cherairongba	1697-1709
50. Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz)	1709-1748
51. Chit Shai	1748-1752
52. Bharat Shai	1752-1753
53. Maramba	1753-1759
54. Chingthongkhomba	1759-1762
55. Maramba	1762-1763
56. Joy Singh (Chingthongkhomba)	1763-1798
57. Labanyachandra Singh	1798-1801
58. Madhu Chandra Singh	1801-1803
59. Chourajit Singh	1803-1813
60. Marjit Singh	1813-1819
61. Hera Chandra	1819 - .. --
62. Yumjaotaba	1820 - .. --
63. Gambir Singh	1821-
64. Joy Singh	1822-
65. Jadu Singh	1823-
66. Raghava Singh	1823-1824
67. Bhadra Singh	1824-
68. Gambir Singh	1825-1834
69. Chandra Kirti Singh	1834-1844
70. Nar Singh	1844-1850
71. Debendra Singh	1850-
72. Chandra Kirti Singh, K.C.S.I.	1850-1886
73. Surachandra Singh	1886-1890
74. Kulachandra Singh	1890-1891
75. Churachand Singh, K.C. S.I.	1891-1941
76. Bodhachandra Singh	1941-1955

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